





Idylls of the King

A Spiritual Interpretation

BY

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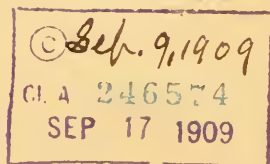


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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Accept this old imperfect tale,
New-old, and shadowing sense at war with soul,
Ideal manhood closed in real man,
Rather than that gray king whose name, a ghost,
Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain peak,
And cleaves to cairn and cromlech still.

To an old sweetheart of mine,
Who showed me the beauty of Tennyson,
Who inspired me to write these chapters,
Who loves the Idylls and embodies their ideals,
The Mother of Enid and Elaine and the Knight LeRoy.

The Idylls of the King are twelve stories of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. The origin of these Arthurian legends is lost in obscurity. But that there was a historical Arthur, as a nucleus around which these legends gathered, seems well established. He is believed to have lived in the sixth century of the Christian Era. In an old Welsh elegy on "The Death of Geraint," one Arthur is mentioned as "the commander of armies, the director of the works of war." Carbdoc, an early historian, tells that Arthur was a king of Devonshire and Cornwall, who waged war with the king of Scotland and also with the king of Somersetshire, who had carried off his queen. A still earlier writer, Nennius, who lived somewhere between the

eighth and tenth centuries, also tells of Arthur, and gives a list of twelve battles against the Saxons. Still stronger evidence is the Arthurian place-names which still exist in west Wales, Strathclyde, and Lothian. Carlion, or Caerleon, mentioned in the legends as one of Arthur's capitals, is identified with Caerleon-on-Usk in Wales. Camelot, his chief seat and stronghold, is believed to be identical with the remains of an old fortress in Somersetshire. In the time of Malory these ruins still bore the name of Camelot, and was thus described: "Four ditches and as many walls surrounded a central space of about thirty acres, where foundations and remains of walls might be seen, and whence Roman pavements, urns, coins, and other relics have been found up to the present time." In maps as late as 1727 it was called the Castle of Camellek, but after that it came to be called Cadbury Castle. The villages near by still bear the names of Queen-Camel, East-Camel, and West-Camel, and near by flows the River Camel. Arthur's bridge and Arthur's well are still pointed out by the peasants, who say that sometimes amid the ruins a king may be seen in the midst of his knights. Mr. Nennet quotes a Cadbury peasant as follows: "Folks do say that on the night of the full moon King Arthur and his men ride round the hill, and their horses are shod with silver, and a silver shoe has been found in the track where they do ride, and when they have ridden round the hill they stop to water their horses at the wishing well." A writer of about 1212 relates that the foresters of Britain tell that at noon, or at midnight when the moon is full and shining, they often see a company of hunters with their dogs and horns, who, when questioned, say they belong to the household of Arthur. These local traditions confirm the conclusion that there was an historical Arthur who reigned in southwest Britain, whose name, character, and exploits were the

germs of the Arthurian legends. This real Arthur was evidently only a local hero, and may have been quite different from the legendary Arthur. But that there existed a real Arthur as the germ of the legendary Arthur there seems little room to doubt. And we may well believe that his character and prowess were such as to be in keeping with the legends which have clustered about his name.

The Grail legend is a later addition to the Arthurian cycle. Just how it originated is not known. Mr. Nutt traces it back to a pagan origin. The sword, the lance, and the vessel were three magic talismans in Celtic mythology. Bran was the ruler of the Other World, and had charge of these talismans. Mr. Nutt supposes that there was at Glastonbury a temple to Bran, which, when Christianity superseded paganism, was transformed into a church. Then St. Joseph took the place of Bran and the talismans were given a Christian significance. The sword is now the sword with which Joseph was wounded, the lance is that which pierced the side of Jesus, and the vessel is the bowl which contained the paschal lamb at the Last Supper. According to the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathæa took the vessel from the Upper Room, and in it caught the blood from Christ's wounds when the body was taken from the cross. When he was imprisoned by the Jews forty years, the Grail kept him alive without food, and gave him spiritual enlightenment. The British legends continue the story. Philip, the Evangelist, sends Joseph to Britain, whither he with some companions proceeds, taking with them the sword, the lance, and the Holy Grail containing the sacred blood, and settle at Glastonbury. After Joseph's death the Grail, with the sword and lance, disappears and is hidden from the sight of men till he who is worthy shall find it. Thence began the search for the lost Grail. It is believed that Walter

Map, who lived in the twelfth century, was the first to give form to the Grail legend and connect it with the story of Arthur. In Malory's account, three of Arthur's knights, Bors, Percivale, and Galahad, find the Grail and the other talismans in the enchanted castle of Carbonek. There Joseph appears to them and prepares to administer the sacrament with the holy vessel, but Joseph vanishes, and out of the vessel comes Christ Himself, and takes the Grail and feeds them therefrom; "and they thought it was so sweet that it was marvelous to tell." And Galahad is commanded to take the Grail and carry it hence to "the city of Sarros, in the spiritual place."

These legends constitute the framework of Tennyson's *Idylls*. But he does more than simply retell the old stories. He selects the best, throwing aside all that is not germane to his purpose. And he alters them and adds to them, creating new characters and new adventures, recasting and recoloring the old stories wherever necessary to the end he has in view. Some critics have censured him for the liberty he has taken with the stories and the characters. Sir Edward Strachey, in his introduction to *Le Morte Darthur*, expresses what ought to be our feeling in regard to this: "There are some of us who in their childhood lived in, or can at least remember, some old house, with its tower and turret stairs, its hall with the screen, and the minstrel's gallery, and the armor where it was hung up by him who last wore it; the paneled chambers, the lady's bower, and the chapel, and all the quaint, rambling passages and steps which led from one to another of these. And when in after years he comes to this same old house, and finds that it has all been remodeled, enlarged, furnished and beautified to meet the needs and the tastes of modern life, he feels that this is not the very home of his childhood, and that a glory has departed from the scenes he once knew; and yet,

if the changes have been made with true judgment, and only with a rightful recognition of the claim that the modern life should have full scope for itself while preserving all that was possible of the old, though not letting itself be sacrificed or even cramped or limited, for its sake: if he is reasonable, he will acknowledge that it was well that the old order should yield place to the new, or at least make room for it at its side. And such are the thoughts and sentiments with which the lover of the old *Morte Arthur* will, if he is also a student of the growth of our national life and character, read the new *Idylls of the King*." Tennyson's great purpose gives him license thus to use the old legends. His purpose is ethical and spiritual, and he bends everything to this. He is writing not simply to entertain, but to instruct and warn and inspire. The *Idylls* is a great moral and religious poem.

But in what way did the poet mean to use these stories? As allegories or parables? The former, says Stopford Brooke. "The poem is an allegory of the soul of man warring with sense, and passing on its way through life to death and through death to resurrection. The great rulers of the kingdom of human nature—the intellect, the conscience, the will, the imagination, the divine spirit in man—are shadowed forth in mystic personages. The historic powers which stand outside the soul and help it to reign and work—the Church, the Law, the great Graces of God—are also embodied. . . . Arthur is the rational soul, coming mysteriously from heaven and washed into Merlin's arms by a great wave. Merlin, who educates him, is intellectual power, with all the magic of science. Arthur's kingship is opposed by the brutal and sensual powers in human nature, but the soul beats them down, and lets in light and justice over the waste places of human nature where the ape, the tiger, and the bandit lurk. Guinevere

is the heart, and all we mean by the term. The soul to do its work must be knit to the heart in noble marriage—Arthur must be wed to Guinevere. The Knights of the Round Table are the high faculties in man whom the soul builds into order around it, to do its just and reforming will." This is the poet's plan which Mr. Brooke sees in the poem, and he brands the plan as a mistake, and the efforts of the poet to carry out this allegorical plan he says "are failures, but they are gigantic struggles for success." He shows the absurdity and futility of trying to find an allegorical meaning to every part of the poem, claims that the allegory limps and breaks down, and so concludes that the poem, in its plan and purpose, is largely a failure.

But was this the poet's plan? Did he set out to make an allegory pure and simple? Is it not possible that Mr Brooke has only knocked down a man of straw of his own manufacture? Over against his view we may set that of Henry VanDyke. He holds that Tennyson intended these stories, not as allegories but as parables. He calls attention to the distinction between an allegory and a parable. An allegory "is a work in which the figures and character are confessedly unreal, a masquerade in which the actors are not men and women, but virtues and vices dressed up in human costume. The distinguishing mark of allegory is personification. It does not deal with actual persons, but with abstract qualities which are treated as if they were persons, and made to speak and act as if alive. It moves, therefore, altogether in a dream-world; it is not only improbable but impossible; at a touch its figures dissolve into thin air." A parable is just the reverse of this; "if instead of a virtue representing a person, the poet gave us a person embodying and representing a virtue; if instead of the oppositions and attractions of abstract qualities, we had the trials and conflicts and loves of

real men and women in whom these qualities were living and working," then we would have a parable. In an allegory the persons are personifications of abstract virtues and vices; in a parable the persons embody virtues and vices. In an allegory an abstraction is dressed up to look like a person; in a parable the abstraction becomes incarnate in a person. With this distinction in view Mr. VanDyke declares, "The poem is not an allegory but a parable." "The attempt to interpret the poem as a strict allegory breaks down at once and spoils the story. Suppose you say that Arthur is Conscience, and Guinevere is the Flesh, and Merlin is the Intellect; then pray what is Lancelot, and what is Geraint, and what is Vivien? What business has the Conscience to fall in love with the Flesh? What attraction has Vivien for the Intellect without any passion? If Merlin is not a man, 'Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galere?' The whole affair becomes absurd, unreal, incomprehensible, uninteresting." However, he says, "There are a great many purely allegorical figures and passages in it." Such, for instance, as the Lady of the Lake, Excalibur, the Three Queens, the visions of Percivale, and the five figures carved upon the rock. This writer takes the view of VanDyke rather than of Brooke. The *Idylls* are more parable than allegory. And yet I think there is more of the allegorical than Dr. VanDyke admits. The poem is neither pure parable nor pure allegory, but a mixture of the two. And the two figures often lie side by side and the one insensibly glides into the other. We may find a parallel to this in the Eden Story. It is not altogether allegory, for Adam and Eve are not personifications, but a man and a woman of flesh and blood and of like passions with ourselves. Nor is it altogether parable, for talking serpents, and magical trees, and fiery, whirling swords do not belong to real life. But it is an

admixture of parable and allegory. So of the *Idylls*. While in the main parabolic, it is often clearly allegorical. The coming of Arthur is allegorical of the origin of the soul. Tennyson has said so himself. Gareth and Lynette begins as parable, but ends with a beautiful allegory of Life and Death. The Holy Grail, without losing its parabolic character, is at the same time allegorical; for the Siege Perilous, in which who sat should lose himself, and the visions of Percivale, and the experience of Lancelot in the enchanted castle, and the Grail with its quest and its wondrous visions, and the passing of Galahad into the spiritual city;—all this is not real but symbolical, not parable but allegory. And the poem closes with an allegory of the passing of the soul into the heavenly world. But whether parable or allegory, the ethical and spiritual purpose of the poet is evident, and great lessons shine forth in every idyll. In the dedication to Queen Victoria, Tennyson declares his purpose. To her he says:

“Accept this old imperfect tale,
New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul,
Ideal manhood closed in real man.”

By Sense he means sensuality, carnality, what St. Paul calls the carnal mind, or the minding of the flesh. By Soul he means the spiritual nature, the moral instincts, the conscience, all of that higher nature of man which links him to God and lifts him upwards, the ideal man which is shut up in the animal man. Between these two natures, or two parts of human nature, there is a constant conflict. As St. Paul declares, “The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary one to the other.” Tennyson’s purpose in this poem is to shadow, or represent parabolically and allegor-

ically, this warfare between the Sense and the Soul, between the carnal nature and the spiritual nature, between animalism and spiritualism, between sin and holiness. How well he has done this I have undertaken to show in the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER II.

THE COMING OF ARTHUR; THE SOUL'S ORIGIN, AND ITS WARFARE, WEAPONS, AND ALLY.

Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow in the sky!
A young man will be wiser by and by;
An old man's wit may wander ere he die.

Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow on the lea!
And truth is this to me, and that to thee;
And truth or clothed or naked let it be.

Rain, sun, and rain! and the free blossom blows!
Sun, rain, and sun! and where is he who knows?
From the great deep to the great deep he goes.

Whence came King Arthur? Whose son is he? Is he the son of Uther, or of Gorlois, or of Anton, or of some one else? Or is he of supernatural origin? The question is raised and various answers given. When King Leodogran asked Bedivere about it, he answered,

“Sir, there be many rumors on this head;
For there be those who hate him in their hearts,
Call him baseborn, and since his ways are sweet,
And theirs are bestial, hold him less than man;
And there be those who deem him more than man,
And dream he dropt from heaven.”

[177-182.

When the same king asked the question of Bellicent, supposed sister of Arthur, she related a wondrous tale, which had been told her by the old magician Bleys as he was dying. Bleys and his pupil in magic, Merlin, were with King Uther in his last hours, and heard him moaning and wailing for an heir to take the crown and hold the realm together. And on the night he died, the two magicians went out into the night air, and walked down to the sea-shore. And there, coming over the sea, they beheld a ship, like unto a winged dragon, and bright with shining figures on the deck, but disappearing as soon as seen. And as they stood by the shore, a great wave came towards them, full of the voices of the deep,



And all the wave was in a flame,
And down the wave, and in the flame was borne
A naked babe, and rode to Merlin's feet,
Who stooped and caught the babe, and cried, "The King!
Here is an heir for Uther!" And the fringe
Of that great breaker, sweeping up the strand,
Lashed at the wizard as he spake the word,
And all at once all 'round him rose in fire,
So that the child and he were clothed in fire.

[381-389.]

"And this same child," said the old magician, "is he who reigns." But when Bellicent asked Merlin of all this, he only laughed and answered in a riddle,

"Rain, sun, and rain! and the free blossom blows.
Sun, rain, and sun! and where is he who knows?
From the great deep to the great deep he goes."

[138-140.]

And there the poet leaves the question of the origin of

Arthur, leaves it wrapped in mystery, but with a supernatural halo about it.

Now, what spiritual idea does the poet shadow forth in this problem? What but the question of the origin of the soul? (Whence comes the soul of man?) Some say it is base-born, that it is of brutal origin, that the soul as well as the body has sprung from the womb of animalism. Some say it is of noble but merely human origin, that the soul is generated like the body and along with the body, and hence has its origin in human parentage, and is of the earth earthy. But the seers tell us that it has a supernatural origin, that it comes from above, that not earth but heaven is its source, that

“The soul that rises with us, our life’s star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting, and cometh from afar.
Not in entire forgetfulness,
Not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come,
From God who is our home.”

Is not this what Tennyson means when he makes Merlin, the wise man, to say of Arthur, “From the great deep to the great deep he goes?” He came from over the sea, and back over the sea he shall go. From the ocean of eternity he came, and to the ocean of eternity he shall return. So the soul of man comes forth in some mysterious way from a mysterious eternity, and by and by returns to eternity again, “from the great deep to the great deep.”

King Arthur looked upon Guinevere, the daughter of King Leodogran, and loved her, and asked her hand in marriage. She was the old king’s only child, and very dear to him, and he had all the pride of royalty, and could not give his daughter in wedlock save to one of royal birth and one who was king indeed. And Leodogran in heart

debated the matter, and inquired of his chief counselor, "Knowest thou aught of Arthur's birth?" But the wise man could tell him naught. Then he called the ambassadors from Arthur's court, and inquired of them, "Hold ye this Arthur for King Uther's son?" And they told him all they knew, asserting their belief that Arthur was born a king. But still Leodogran

Debated with himself
If Arthur were the child of shamefulness,
Or born the son of Gorlois after death,
Or Uther's son and born before his time,
Or whether there were truth in anything
Said by these three.

[237-242.]

Then when Queen Bellicent came and told him what she knew of Arthur, and the magician's story of his supernatural origin, and the supernatural marvels at his coronation, Leodogran, half convinced, still hesitated, and

Musing, "Shall I answer yea or nay?"
Doubted, and drowsed, nodded and slept.

[425-6.]

And as he slept he dreamed, and in his vision, "the King stood out in heaven crowned," and when he awoke Leodogran accepted the vision as a heaven-sent credential of Arthur's royalty, and sent the ambassadors

Back to the court of Arthur answering Yea.

[445.]

His doubts were vanished, and he gave to Arthur his confidence and his child.

Herein is pictured the soul in conflict with doubt. As

Leodogran was beset with doubts concerning the royal birth and kingly character of Arthur, so the souls of men are beset with doubts concerning the Divine origin and Divine character of Jesus and His religion. And as Leodogran could not yield his treasure and bestow his confidence on Arthur till these doubts were solved, so men do not give their hearts and their loyalty to Jesus till doubt gives way to faith. And as the old king needed not only to be convinced by reason, but must have reason confirmed by a heavenly vision, so the solvent of men's doubts is not reason alone but the spiritual vision of the truth. We may think the argument sufficient, but it is only when we see "the King stand out in heaven, crowned," that our souls answer, "Yea," and we yield Him our heart's eternal fealty. Herein, too, we may learn how doubt must be conquered. Leodogran conquered his doubts, not by hiding and smothering them, but by propounding them and facing them and seeking for the truth. And thus alone can we conquer the doubts that beset us; we must not try to dodge them, but fairly and squarely face them, and seek for their true solution. We must do as did another of whom Tennyson sings:

He fought his doubts and gathered strength;
He would not make his judgment blind,
He faced the spectres of the mind
And laid them; thus he came at length
To find a stronger faith his own.

[*In Memoriam*, Canto 96.]

The sword with which King Arthur fought his battles was called Excalibur. A wonderful weapon was this—wonderful in its appearance, and irresistible in the hands of Arthur. It was set

With jewels, elfin Urim, on the hilt,
Bewildering heart and eye—the blade so bright
That men are blinded by it.

[298-300.

All the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth work
Of subtlest jewelry.

[*Passing of Arthur*, 224-226.

This mystic brand was not of human workmanship, but was of supernatural origin. It was given to the King by the Lady of the Lake. He saw one day a hand, uplifting the sword, rise up from the bosom of the lake, and he rowed across and took it. And when Arthur's days on earth were drawing to a close, at his command Bedivere threw the sword into the lake, and the same mystic hand rose up to receive it. It was a gift from the Lady of the Lake, and to her hand it was returned. A sword with such an origin, and of such a character, is certainly meant by the poet to have an allegorical significance. What, then, does it symbolize? One of two things, either the weapon of spiritual warfare, or the temporal power of Christianity. It might fittingly represent that weapon which St. Paul recommends to the Christian in the Sixth of Ephesians, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," and which is elsewhere described as "sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow." The Sword of the Spirit, like Excalibur, is set with many a precious jewel, and from their facets flash a heavenly light, and its blade is so bright that it blinds and bewilders its enemies. It, too, is of supernatural origin, being the gift of that fair queen, Religion. It is the one great weapon which Religion has given to us, with which Soul wars against Sense,

and with which we are to fight the battles of our Lord. Our Captain Himself used this weapon when, in the wilderness, He was attacked by the Black Knight, Temptation, and with this flaming brand He put the enemy to flight. With this weapon the soldiers of the Cross went forth and conquered the Roman Empire. With this same brand we, too, are commissioned to go and conquer all nations and bring them into subjection to our King. And with this we may conquer the enemies within, and bring every passion, and every purpose, and every thought into captivity to Christ. Such a glorious, resplendent, all-conquering weapon of spiritual warfare might well be symbolized by Excalibur, the beautiful, the magnificent, the irresistible, the mysterious sword given to Arthur by the mystic Lady of the Lake.

And yet it is not clear that this was the thought in the mind of the poet. The inscription on Excalibur is hardly reconcilable with this interpretation:

On one side

Graven in the oldest tongue of all this world,
 "Take me!" but turn the blade and ye shall see,
 And written in the speech ye speak yourself,
 "Cast me away!"

[300-304.

Now the Sword of the Spirit is not something to be taken and by and by cast away. If Excalibur symbolized the Word of God the poet would hardly have represented Arthur as compelling Bedivere to cast it into the lake. So it seems more probable that this mystic brand signifies another kind of weapon, entrusted to the Church for a time, but by and by, having served its purpose, to be laid aside, that is, the temporal or secular power of Christianity. There have been times when such a power was needful,

seemingly essential to the very life of Christianity, times when the Church must either arise and smite its enemies, or be destroyed by them. Take for instance the time when the Saracens, followers of Mahomet, subduing all before them, putting to the sword all who did not accept their religion, crossed the Strait of Gibraltar, and threatened to bring all Europe under the banner of the Crescent and the dominion of Islam;—what would have been the fate of Europe, what would have been the fate of the Christian Church, had they not been met and crushed by Charles Martel, wielding the weapon of military power? Humanly speaking at least, the world owes Christianity to the Excalibur of Charles Martel. So there have been times many when the weapon of carnal warfare was the weapon with which the Kingdom of Heaven has had to fight its battles. But on the other side of Excalibur was

Written in the speech ye speak yourselves,
“Cast me away.”

This weapon was only for the exigencies of a season, a new order should arise when such a weapon would be no longer necessary, and then it must be cast away. That time has come; the Church no longer needs to fight for existence against heathen hordes; it has become a world-conqueror, its permanency and power is assured. Henceforth its work is to be accomplished “not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord.”

The Lady of the Lake is another allegorical feature of the poem. She does not appear as a real person in the story, a woman of flesh and blood like Bellicent or Guinevere. She is a personification of Religion, the ally of the Soul. It was she who gave to Arthur the mystic sword. She was present to sanction his coronation, attended by three fairs queens—Faith, Hope, and Love. She was

"clothed in white samite," emblem of purity. The "mist of incense curled about her" signifies the worship ever associated with religion. "Her face well-nigh hidden in the minster gloom" symbolizes its background and atmosphere of mystery. Her dwelling

Down in a deep—calm, whatsoe'er the storms
May shake the world,

[291-2.

is the same great deep from which Arthur came and to which he was to go, the depths of eternity. In the second *Idyll*, Tennyson carries out this allegory further. He describes the Lady of the Lake sculptured on the gate of Camelot:

And there was no gate like it under heaven.
For barefoot on the keystone, which was lined
And rippled like an ever-fleeting wave,
The Lady of the Lake stood; all her dress
Wept from her sides as water flowing away;
But like the cross her great and goodly arms
Stretched under all the cornice and upheld.
And drops of water fell from either hand;
And down from one a sword was hung, from one
A censer, either worn with wind and storm;
And on her breast floated the sacred fish.

[*Gareth and Lynette*, 209-219.

What a beautiful picture of religion is this! Her dress—her outward form—mobile, mutable, constantly changing, flowing like water; her arms—her moral and spiritual power—immovable and eternal, upholding the fabric of the world; the water dropping from her hands—the waters of baptism—symbolizing the cleansing power of religion; the sword—symbol of justice, and the censer—symbol of

worship, both marked by the storms and strifes of centuries; on her breast the sacred fish—in the early days of persecution the secret symbol of Christ (the initials of the Greek word standing for “Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Saviour”)—signifying that at the very heart of religion stands Jesus, the Divine Son, the Saviour of the world.

CHAPTER III.

GARETH AND LYNETTE; THE SOUL VERSUS DOUBT, PRIDE, SIN AND DEATH.

"Sir Knave, my knight, a hermit once was here,
Whose holy hand hath fashioned on the rock
The war of Time against the soul of man.
And you four fools have sucked their allegory
From these damp walls, and taken but the form.
Know ye not these?" and Gareth looked and read,
"Phosphorus," then "Meridies"—"Hesperus"—
"Nox"—"Mors," beneath five figures, armed men,
Slab after slab, their faces forward all,
And running down the Soul, a shape that fled
With broken wings, torn raiment, and loose hair,
For help and shelter to the hermit's cave.

Gareth, youngest son of Queen Bellicent, was ambitious to be a knight and join King Arthur's Table Round. But his mother fain would have dissuaded him and kept him with herself. Day by day he pled to go and she to detain him. At last she consented on a condition which she thought he would not meet, viz., that he go to Arthur's hall disguised as a servant and serve as a kitchen-knave twelve months and a day. He accepts the condition, and sets forth with two faithful servants. Faithfully he serves for a month, when his mother repents, and sends him arms, and releases him from the vow. Then is he knighted in secret, and only Arthur and Lancelot know him knight and prince. That same day, as he stands in the hall among

the knights, his bright armor concealed by the servant's cloak, a fair damsel named Lynette comes to the king for help. Her sister Lyonors is shut up in her castle, beset by four outlaw knights who guard the passes. To Gareth the king gives the commission to redress this wrong and deliver the lady. The adventures of the young knight on this quest will be noticed later. It is my purpose to point out how this story sets forth "Sense at war with Soul," or the spiritual conflicts of man.

Here again we meet the conflict with doubt, but doubt under a new form. It is not the doubt of Leodogran. He doubted whether Arthur be of royal birth, and whether he be rightful king. But such questions troubled Gareth not at all. His mother, seeking to detain him, said,

"Sweet son, for there be many who deem him not,
Or will not deem him, wholly proven king—
. . . wilt thou leave
Thine easeful biding here, and risk thine all,
Life, limbs, for one that is not proven king?
Stay, till the cloud that settles 'round his birth
Hath lifted but a little. Stay, sweet son."

[119-130.]

But Gareth answered,

"Not proven, who swept the dust of ruined Rome
From off the threshold of the realm, and crushed
The idolaters, and made the people free?
Who should be king save him who makes us free?"

[131-134.]

Noble answer that, and fit answer to those who would trouble us with doubts about the kingship of our King, about the manner of His birth, about His Divine nature and authority. "Stay," they say, "withhold your allegiance and

your service till these questions be settled and he is proven king." To such let us answer, "His character is His kingly credential, His deeds proclaim Him King, He has conquered Rome and crushed idolatry, He has given us spiritual freedom, and 'Who should be King save Him who makes us free?' "

The conflict herein figured is with doubt more subtle and far-reaching, involving a question of philosophy. As Gareth and his servants approached Camelot, the royal city, the two servants besought him to turn back,

One crying, "Let us go no further, lord;
Here is a city of enchanters, built
By fairy kings." The second echoed him,
"Lord, we have heard from our wise man at home
To northward, that this king is not the King,
But only changeling out of Fairyland,
Who drave the heathen hence by sorcery
And Merlin's glamour."

[195-202.

These doubts disturb not Gareth till they reach the City's gate, but the weirdness of its carvings, whereon the figures seemed to move as if alive, shook even his brave heart. And when Merlin came out from the city, Gareth said to him,

"These my men
Doubt if the King be king at all, or come
From Fairyland; and whether this be built
By magic, and by fairy kings and queens;
Or whether there be any city at all,
Or all a vision."

[240-246.

To which Merlin answered, mocking him,

“It is enchanted, son,
For there is nothing in it as it seems
Saving the King; though some there be that hold
The King a shadow, and the city real.”

[259-262.]

But Gareth “with all good cheer,” entered through the gate, and found a real city of wood and stone, and a real King of flesh and blood, and real knights in armor clad, and real wrongs to be redressed. His doubts about the reality of things were conquered, and to him life became real, life became earnest.

This mental experience of Gareth is a parable of the doubt which has often perplexed the minds of men concerning the reality of things. What is real? Is this visible, tangible universe real, or only imaginary, subjective, vision of the mind? Is man himself real, or only a “vision to himself”? Is it true that ✓

“Life is but an empty dream,
And the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem”?

Is it true of the universe,

There is nothing in it as it seems
Saving the King?

Or is it true, as some hold, that “The King is a shadow,” that God is a myth, and this material world the only reality? Or is there nothing real? Is existence only a dream, a nightmare, a vision? These are the questions propounded, these are doubts portrayed in the parable of Gareth and Lynette. And the answer wrought out is clear and reassuring; God is real, the world is real, men and

women are real, sin and wrong is real, duty and right is real, life is real, and love is life's crowning reality.

✓ Yet more clearly this parable portrays the conflict between a noble ambition and a false pride, Gareth embodying the one and Lynette the other. The youth in the seclusion of his castle home felt within him the stirrings of ambition, the longing to do something that would be noble and would give him an honorable name. One day he told his mother of a prince who desired a bride, and his father

“Set two before him. One was fair, strong, armed—
But to be won by force—and many men
Desired her; one, good lack, no man desired.
And these were the conditions of the king;
That save he won the first by force, he needs
Must wed the other, whom no man desired.”

[103-108.

The one they called Fame, the other Shame. He saw before him fame or shame. His ambition was for fame, not for a shallow, worldly fame; nor for mere notoriety; but for that Good Name which the Wise Man says “is better than silver and gold,” and which taken from us “leaves us poor indeed”; that Spotless Reputation which Shakespeare says “is the purest treasure mortal times afford”; that Fame which Milton calls

“The spur that the clear spirit doth raise
To Scorn delights and live laborious days;
Which is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
Nor in the glistening foil
Set off to the world, nor in broad rumor lies,
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove.”

This was the fame for which Gareth longed. His ambition was to

“Follow the Christ, the King,
Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King.”
[116-117.]

If he thought to do these things for the sake of worldly applause the King gently rebukes him, saying,

“Wherefore would ye men should wonder at you?
Nay, rather for the sake of me, their King,
And for the deed’s sake my knighthood do the deed,
Than to be noised of.”

[557-560.]

And Gareth learns the lesson, for when thanked and offered reward for his first knightly deed, he replies,

“For the deed’s sake have I done the deed,
In uttermost obedience to the King.”

[811-812.]

Over against this worthy ambition stands false pride in the person of Lynette. To quote from Dr. VanDyke, “Lynette is a society girl, a worshiper of rank and station; brave, high-spirited, lovable, but narrow-minded, and scornful of every one who lacks the visible marks of distinction.” In the war of Sense against the Soul she is on the side of Sense, she judges by the senses, not by the spirit. She judges Gareth by his station and occupation. Because he is a kitchen servant and toils among the pots, she thinks him mean and craven, despises him and scorns his services. Then comes the battle between this noble ambition and this false pride. In anger she mounts her horse and gallops away; he mounts and follows. When he overtakes her, she showers abuse upon him, but he answers only, “Lead and I follow.” Again she flies from him, and when

overtaken, calls him all mean names in her vocabulary, to which he answers,

“Damsel, say
Whate’er ye will, but whatsoe’er ye say,
I leave not till I finish this fair quest,
Or die therefore.” [753-756.

When she loses her way, and they are compelled to spend the night with a baron whose life Gareth has saved, and the baron seats them at the same table, Lynette rises in anger and upbraids the host for setting this knave beside a noble gentlewoman! Still not rebuffed even by this insult, on the morn he says, “Lead, and I follow.” Haughtily she replies,

“I fly no more; I allow thee for an hour.
Lion and stoat have isled together, knave,
In time of flood.” [870-2.

And he replies gently,

“Say thou thy say, and I will do my deed.” [879.

On they go; he meets the robber knights that guard the passes, and overthrows them. And as the third one goes down, pride is overthrown, the pride that ruled in Lynette’s heart, and she says to the brave knight,

“I lead no longer; ride thou at my side;
Thou are the kingliest of all kitchen knaves.
Shamed am I that I so rebuked, reviled,
Missaid thee. . . . And now thy pardon, friend.
For thou hast ever answered courteously,
And wholly bold thou art, and meek withal
As any of Arthur’s best.” [1128-1140.

The ambitious youth, inspired by a lofty purpose, conquered not only the robber knights, but the false pride that

ruled in the heart of Lynette and struggled for mastery in his own. He showed that true knighthood and true nobility consist not in name and station, but in gentleness and meekness and courage and self-control,—in character and in deed. He proved that

“The thrall in person may be free in soul.”

[162.

He exemplified true knighthood when he

Wrought

All kind of service with a noble ease

That graced the lowliest act in doing it.

[478-480.

The parable is but another picture of Sense at war with Soul, and Soul is again crowned victor.

Those knights against whom Gareth fought had strange names and strange armor. The first was called Morning-Star. He dwelt in a silk pavilion, gorgeously colored with hues of gold and daffodil and purple and crimson. He was attended by three fair maidens in gilt and rosy raiment, their feet glistening in dewy grasses, their hair sparkling with dewdrops. He was clad in blue armor, and carried a blue shield on which glittered the morning star. Sir Gareth and Sir Morning-Star met in combat on the bridge which spanned the stream, and in the shock both were unhorsed. Then they drew sword, but Gareth struck so fiercely that he drove his enemy back, and finally felled him. The second knight was named the Noonday-Sun. His face was red, he rode a red horse, his armor was glittering bright to blinding, his shield flashed in the sunlight till

Gareth's eyes had flying blots

Before them when he turned from watching him.

[1005-6.

In midstream they met, and fiercely they fought, not with lance but sword, face to face and hand to hand. And Gareth feared he might be shamed, for this knight was stronger than the first. But the elements helped the youth, and Sir Sun was swept down by the raging stream. The third knight called himself Star of Evening. He was wrapped in hardened skins, so tough no sword could cleave them. He tented in "an old storm-beaten, russet, many stained pavilion." From the tent came forth a gray-haired spinster,

And armed him in old arms, and brought a helm
With but a drying evergreen for crest,
And gave a shield whereon the star of even
Half-tarnished, half-bright, his emblem, shone.

[1087-1099.]

The bridge became their battle-ground. At first they met with horse and lance, and Gareth overthrew his foe. But up he sprang, and Gareth, lighting, attacked him with sword,

And overthrew him again
But up like fire he started; and as oft
As Gareth brought him groveling on his knees,
So many a time he vaulted up again.

[1094-1097.]

Gareth hewed his armor off, but lashed in vain against the hardened skin, and could not beat him down. At length Gareth's sword clashed that of his foe, and shattered it. But when he thought the victory won, the treacherous knight sprang upon him, and had well-nigh strangled him. But Gareth put forth his uttermost strength, and hurled him headlong over the bridge.

What is the meaning of all this? What would the poet

have us understand by these knights and these conflicts? He has not left us in doubt, but has woven the interpretation into the story. Near by the scene of this last conflict stood slabs of rock with figures sculptured thereon, knights on horseback, and underneath the knights the names Phosphorus, Meridies, Hesperus, Nox, Mors (Morning-Star, Noon-Day, Evening-Star, Night, Death). The knights are

Running down the Soul, a shape that fled
With broken wings, torn raiment, and loose hair
For help and shelter to the hermit's cave.

[1177-1179.

Lynette informs Gareth that once a hermit lived here

"Whose holy hand hath fashioned on the rock
The war of Time against the soul of man."

[1167-8.

This, then, is the meaning of the knights fighting against Gareth; the allegory of the hermit is the allegory of the poet; it is "the war of Time against the soul of man." In the hermit's allegory the soul is defeated and is flying for refuge to the hermit's cave, but in the poet's allegory the soul is victor. It represents the soul's struggles with the temptations of youth and of manhood and of old age. The knight of the Morning-Star stands for the temptation which meets the soul in the bright morning of youth, and which may without great difficulty be conquered. The knight named Noonday-Sun images the temptation which confronts us at the midday of life, which is stronger and more difficult of conquest. And the knight called Evening-Star figures the temptation with which man must war in life's evening, a foe, wary, wiry, and persistent, one

that must be conquered not once but many times. In battling with this last Gareth

Seemed as one
That all in later, sadder age begins
To war against ill uses of a life,
But these from all his life arise, and cry,
"Thou hast made us lords, and canst not put us down."
[1100-1104.

But as Gareth conquered all, so may the soul win the victory over all the temptations of life.

But there was yet another struggle for our hero ere his quest was accomplished. There was a fourth knight, calling himself Sir Death, whose black pavilion with its black banner stood at the end of the journey and guarded the entrance to the castle of Lady Lyonors. He was reputed to be a monster of great might, pitiless, ferocious, "massacring man, woman, lad, and girl—yea, the soft babe." When Gareth blew the horn, the black curtains of the black tent opened, and Sir Death came forth, mounted on a night-black horse, clad in night-black armor with white breastbone and ribs painted thereon, and crowned with a hideous grinning skull. His appearance struck terror to the hearts of the beholders. Lynette fainted; Lady Lyonors wrung her hands and wept; Sir Lancelot felt his blood chill; and Sir Gareth's hair stood up. But the horses rushed forward to the fray, and in the tilt

Death was cast to ground, and slowly rose.
But with one stroke Sir Gareth split the skull.
Half fell to right and half to left and lay.
Then with a stronger buffet he clove the helm

As thoroughly as the skull ; and out from this
Issued the bright face of a blooming boy
Fresh as a flower new-born.

[1360-1366.

And then the new day dawned, and Gareth and his friends

Made merry over Death,
As being after all their foolish fears
And horrors only proven a blooming boy.
So large mirth lived, and Gareth won the quest.

[1388-1391.

The meaning of this is obvious. Death is not the formidable foe men think him to be, not the terrible monster he seems to be. He is the last enemy the soul must meet in its quest, and yet if bravely met no real enemy at all, an enemy only in semblance. And he who conquers Death wins an immortal youth.

CHAPTER IV.

GERAINT AND ENID; THE SOUL VERSUS ARROGANCE AND JEALOUSY.

Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel, and lower the proud;
Turn thy wild wheel through sunshine, storm and cloud;
Thy wheel and thee we neither love nor hate.

Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel with smile or frown;
With that wild wheel we go nor up nor down;
Our hoard is little, but our hearts are great.

Smile and we smile, the lords of many lands;
Frown and we smile, the lords of our own hands;
For man is man and master of his fate.

Turn, turn thy wheel above the staring crowd;
Thy wheel and thou are shadows in the cloud;
Thy wheel and thee we neither love nor hate.

Under this title we shall study two of the *Idylls*, the Marriage of Geraint and Geraint and Enid. In the older editions of Tennyson's poems the story constituted one poem, but in later editions it has been divided into two. It is really one poem, and should never have been cut in twain. The Marriage of Geraint is just as much the marriage of Enid, and the story of the two, begun in the first, is continued in the second. The original title of the poem was Enid, and this is the better name for it, for Enid is the heroine of the story, but Geraint can hardly be called the hero. Edyrn might well dispute that honor with him, with the odds in favor of Edyrn, and supported by the judgment of King Arthur. But Enid is a true heroine, and deserves to be honored by giving the poem her name.

This poem sets forth two aspects of the conflict of Soul against Sense. The first we shall consider is the conflict of the Soul with Arrogant Pride. This is pictured in the fall and regeneration of Edyrn. It is incidental and secondary to the main thread of the story and the prime purpose of the poem, but its lesson is equally important. Edyrn, when first we meet him, is an incarnation of arrogant pride. This was his weakness, this was his besetting sin, this was the one great vice which ruled in his heart and surrounded itself with kindred vices, as an evil king attracts to himself evil courtiers. Edyrn wooed his cousin Enid, but was rejected because unworthy and unlovable. Then his pride transformed his passion to spite, and he vented his spleen on Enid and her parents. By fraud and villainy he drove the old earl from his castle, deprived him of his earldom, seized his property and usurped his place. Thinking to humiliate Enid still further, he gave an annual tournament in which was offered a golden sparrowhawk to him who overcame. This he himself always won and gave it to his paramour. And he hoped that some day Enid's lover would come to contend for the prize, and he would overcome him and trample on him and kill him in spite of her prayers and tears. For he so waxed in pride that he believed himself unconquerable. By and by the man he looked for came, Enid's lover, Geraint. But Geraint overthrew him, and set foot on his breast, and made him promise to redress the wrong he had done the old earl, and to ride to Arthur's court and crave pardon of the Queen. But Edyrn's undoing was his remaking. His defeat was the breaking of his pride, the conquest of his arrogance. His overthrow was his upthrow, his downfall was his uprising, his ruin was his regeneration. When a year later he met Geraint he said to him,

“I love you, prince, with something of the love
Wherewith we love the Heaven that chastens us.
For once, when I was up so high in pride
That I was half-way down the slope to hell,
By overthrowing me you threw me higher.”

[*Geraint and Enid*, 787-791.]

And to Enid he says,

“Once you came, and with your own true eyes
Beheld the man you loved (I speak as one
Speaks of a service done him) overthrow
My proud self, and my purpose three years old,
And set his foot upon me, and give me life.
There was I broken down, there was I saved.”

[*Geraint and Enid*, 845-850.]

This, however, was only the beginning of his reformation. He went to Arthur's hall hating his life, and contemplating self-destruction. He went sullen and defiant, expecting to be treated as a wolf, but he tells Enid he found

“Instead of scornful pity or pure scorn,
Such fine reserve and noble reticence,
Manners so kind, yet stately, such a grace
Of tenderest courtesy, that I began
To glance behind me at my former life,
And find it had been the wolf's indeed.”

[*Geraint and Enid*, 858-863.]

The kindness, the gentleness, the tender courtesy and courtliness, the knightliness of noble knights, and the kingliness of the King,—this was the bright background which showed by contrast the blackness of his past life. And the power of associations and companionships helped forward

his reformation. Nor was this sufficient; there was a part for the Church and religion to do;

“Oft I talked with Dubric, the high saint,
Who, with mild heat of holy oratory,
Subdued me somewhat to the gentleness
Which, when it weds with manhood, makes a man.”
[*Geraint and Enid*, 864-867.]

Thus did Edyrn “slowly draw himself bright from his old dark life.” He used

Both grace and will to pick the vicious quitch
Of blood and custom wholly out of him,
And make all clean, and plant himself afresh.
[*Geraint and Enid*, 902-904.]

And Arthur made him a Knight of the Table Round, having proved him one of the “noblest, most valorous, sanest and most obedient.” Edyrn proved himself a real hero. What he did in changing his heart, in reforming his manner of life, in regenerating his character, required courage of the highest kind, and showed genuine heroism. This fact Tennyson recognizes and brings out with emphasis. Arthur puts the achievement of Edyrn far above the deeds of Geraint fresh from his conquest of the robbers, saying,

“This work of Edyrn, wrought upon himself
After a life of violence, seems to me
A thousand-fold more great and wonderful,
Than if some knight of mine, risking his life,
My subject with my subjects under him,
Should make an onslaught single on a realm
Of robbers, though he slew them one by one,
And were himself nigh wounded to the death.”
[*Geraint and Enid*, 911-918.]

The main thread of our story, however, is a parable of love and jealousy. It tells the story of Geraint and Enid in their relation to each other. Enid is the embodiment of loyal love. She loves truly and deeply, so thoroughly that there is no room in her heart for even the shadow of a suspicion. Her love is spiritual and unselfish. Geraint is the embodiment of suspicion and jealousy. He, too, loves, but his love is more sensual and selfish. He loves Enid more for her fair face and sweet voice than for her inner soul. And so his love, being not so deeply rooted in his soul, leaves room for suspicion, and suspicion creates jealousy. His love is not grounded in perfect faith nor does it beget perfect faith. And love without faith is hardly love at all. As Vivien sang,

“In love, if love be love, if love be ours,
Faith and unfaith can ne’er be equal powers:
Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all.”

[*Merlin and Vivien*, 385-387.]

This was the fatal flaw in Geraint’s love, this was the little rift within the lute that in a twelvemonth made the music mute. The folly and misery of such unfaith the poet expresses in the prelude to the second part:

O purblind race of miserable men,
How many among us at this very hour
Do forge a lifelong trouble for ourselves,
By taking true for false, or false for true;
Here, through the feeble twilight of this world
Groping, how many, until we pass and reach
That other where we see as we are seen.

[*Geraint and Enid*, 1-7.]

To paint the foolishness of such folly, the misery of such blindness, the cruelty of suspicion, and the madness of jealousy, this is the poet's purpose. The parable sets forth the conflict between loyal love in the person of Enid and jealous suspicion in the person of Geraint.

Even before they are wed, Geraint's suspicious nature crops out. After Enid has given her promise, he doubts whether her love be genuine, fearing lest she has been unduly influenced by her parents, or lest perchance his station and the glitter of the court have been the primal factors in her choice. So to test her love he asks that she lay aside the lovely gown, the gift of her mother, and wear to court the old and faded dress she wore when first they met. And Enid, being loyal and meek, does as she is bidden. They go to Arthur's court, and there are wed, and Enid becomes close friend to the Queen. For a while happily they live, Geraint rejoicing in the friendship of Enid with the Queen, till vague rumors arise about the purity of the Queen. He, believing these rumors, determines to take his wife away from the danger of pollution, so goes to his own realm. There he conceives a suspicion that her nature has received a taint from contact with Guinevere, and suspicion begets jealousy in his heart. One morning she, sitting beside him while he sleeps, is meditating about her wifely duty and how she fails therein. Stirred by her emotion, she speaks half aloud, and this awakens him, and he hears her saying, "O me, I fear I am no true wife." He jumps at once to the conclusion that this is her self-confession that she is in heart untrue to him, that she is pining for another. In hot anger he springs up, orders his charger and her palfry, and bids her put on her worst and meanest dress, and ride with him into the wilderness. Enid puts on the faded silk, and they

go forth into the dangers of the wilderness, she at his command riding far before. For he says to her,

“Not at my side. I charge thee ride before,
Ever a good way on before; and this
I charge thee, on thy duty as a wife,
Whatever happens, not to speak to me,
No, not a word.”

[*Geraint and Enid*, 14-18.]

About the middle of the morning Enid sees three armed horsemen hiding behind a rock, and turns back to warn Geraint, preferring to face his anger and even die by his hand than to endanger him. Scorning her kindness, he attacks the bandits and overthrows them. On they go, till she spies in the wood three other robber knights, waiting to fall upon him. Again she stops to warn him, to be requited with a wrathful answer, he adding insult to injury, saying,

“If I fall, cleave to the better man.”

[*Geraint and Enid*, 152.]

He slays the robbers. Then on again till they come to a town, where they hire a lodging for the night. Then comes to visit them Earl Limours, an old lover of hers, a brilliant, genial, but perfidious and impure man. He talks himself into the confidence of Geraint, then with his leave speaks to Enid, whispering of his old love, commenting on the estrangement between her and her husband, endeavoring to convince her that Geraint loves her no longer nor ever will, but declaring that his love for her is as strong as ever, and begging the privilege of delivering her from her husband and making her his wife. This subtle and passionate temptation, which to a soul weaker and less loyal would have been powerful, was to Enid only insult.

But fearing that what she did not grant might be taken by force, she answers craftily, telling him to come in the morning and take her from her lord as if against her will. Early in the morning, she awakens Geraint and tells him of Limours's proposal and her craft. He, still wrathful and jealous, calls for horses, and they depart. Limours, following, is killed, and his followers dispersed. But Geraint is wounded, and presently fainting from loss of blood, falls from his horse. Enid hastening back, binds up his wound, and tends him, till the robber earl, named Doorm, comes by with a band of his followers. She halts them and asks for help, and two of the robbers are appointed to convey them to the castle near by. Long lies Geraint unconscious, and Enid sits by him, holding his head, rubbing his hands, and calling to him. And when consciousness returns he feels her tears falling on his face, and says in his heart, "She weeps for me," but feigns that he is still unconscious.

When Earl Doorm returns laden with bounty, and they sit down to eat and drink, he commands Enid to eat. But she replies,

"No, no, I will not eat
Till yonder man upon the bier arise,
And eat with me."

[*Geraint and Enid*, 655-657.]

He bids her drink, but she steadfastly answers,

"Not so, by Heaven, I will not drink
Till my dear lord arise and bid me do it,
And drink with me; and if he rise no more
I will not look at wine until I die."

[*Geraint and Enid*, 663-666.]

Provoked that she will not obey him, the rude earl slaps her in the face. Then Geraint leaps up and seizes his sword and smites the ruffian's head off. His followers, seeing a dead man arise, and seeing their leader slain, flee in terror, and the two are left alone together. Then Geraint makes his acknowledgment, saying,

“Enid, I have used you worse than that dead man,
Done you more wrong; we both have undergone
That trouble which has left me thrice your own.
Henceforth I would rather die than doubt.”

[*Geraint and Enid*, 734-737.]

The long and bitter conflict is over; suspicion and jealousy are overthrown, and loyalty and love have conquered. They mount his steed, and

He turned his face
And kissed her climbing, and she cast her arms
About him, and at once they rode away.
And never yet, since high in Paradise
O'er the four rivers the first roses blew,
Came purer pleasure unto mortal kind
Than lived through her who in that perilous hour
Put hand to hand beneath her husband's heart,
And felt him hers again. She did not weep,
But o'er her meek eyes came a happy mist
Like that which kept the heart of Eden green
Before the useful trouble of the rain.

[*Geraint and Enid*, 758-769.]

Geraint's heart, a love which was deeper and purer, a love which was rooted in his innermost character and twined itself around the very soul of Enid, a love which doubted nevermore and questioned not at all. And their pure love

for one another blessed and ennobled their lives. Return-
ing to their own land, Geraint

Kept the justice of the King
So vigorously yet mildly that all hearts
Applauded, and the spiteful whisper died.
They called him the great prince and man of men.
But Enid, whom her ladies loved to call
Enid the Fair, a grateful people named
Enid the Good. . . . Nor did he doubt her more,
But rested in her fealty till he crowned
A happy life with a fair death, and fell
Against the heathen of the Northern Sea,
In battle, fighting for the blameless King.

[*Geraint and Enid*, 955-965.]

CHAPTER V.

BALIN AND BALAN; THE SOUL VERSUS TEMPER.

“Good my brother, hear!

Let not thy moods prevail when I am gone
Who used to lay them! Hold them outer fiends,
Who leap at thee to tear thee; shake them aside,
Dreams ruling when wit sleeps! Yea, but to dream
That any of these would wrong thee wrongs thyself.
Witness their flowery welcome. Bound are they
To speak no evil. Truly, save for fears,
My fears for thee, so rich a fellowship
Would make me wholly blest; thou one of them,
Be one indeed. Consider them, and all
Their bearing in their common bond of love,
No more of hatred than in heaven itself,
No more of jealousy than in Paradise.”

Balin and Balan were twin brothers, and alike in strength, in courage, in simplicity, and in honesty. But in temper they were unlike. Balin was possessed of a fiery temper which at times flamed up, and consumed his better nature, and impelled him to deeds of violence. But Balan was meek and gentle, holding the reins of his temper, and keeping his angry passions within proper bounds. “Both men,” says VanDyke, “represent force; but one is force under dominion of soul, the other is force under the dominion of sense.” Balin is the incarnation of violent passion, and the idyll tells of his struggle against this passion. The purpose of the poem, then, is to portray the

Soul's conflict with anger or violent Temper. It is pictured as a long drawn-out battle, with allies on either side, and with varying fortunes.

On the side of the Soul is Brotherly Devotion in the person of Balan. He was true brother to Balin, and his guardian angel. Ever he watched over him and strove to save him from the power of his evil Temper. As David's harp drove the evil spirit from the heart of Saul, so the gentle music of Balan's voice had power to dispel the angry moods which came upon Balin. And when they needs must separate Balan fortifies his brother with words of encouragement, saying,

"Let not thy moods prevail when I am gone
Who used to lay them! Hold them outer fiends,
Who leap at thee to tear thee; shake them aside,
Dreams ruling when wit sleeps! yea, but to dream
That any of these would wrong thee wrongs thyself."

[137-141.]

Another ally of the Soul in this struggle was the Gentle Courtesy in all the atmosphere of the court. Courtesy is contagious, and Balin, moving in a realm where gentle speech seemed vernacular, and ill-temper was never allowed to show itself, and knights and ladies were gentle men and gentle women in all their outward bearing,—Balin, breathing this atmosphere of courtesy, partook somewhat of the gentleness of the court, "learned the graces of the Table Round," and "felt his being move in music with his Order and the King." He saw

"Their bearing in their common bond of love,
No more of hatred than in heaven itself,
No more of jealousy than in Paradise."

[147-149.]

Believing this of the knights of the Round Table, and being one of them, he strove to become one in truth. Great indeed is the power of good associations to help us overcome the evil in us and to inspire us and lift us to nobler things. And this helped Balin not a little.

But his greatest allies were the Ideals he saw in Lancelot and Guinevere. These were his beau-ideals. He determined

To learn what Arthur meant by courtesy,
Manhood, and knighthood; wherefore hovered round
Lancelot.

[155-157.]

This knight seemed to him like a lofty mountain peak bathed in sunlight or "touching at night the northern star." And ever he longed, yet despairing, to be like Lancelot. And this ideal which he saw, or thought he saw, in Lancelot was lifting him upward, and helping him to conquer Temper. But what, he asked himself, is the secret of Lancelot's greatness? What but the friendship with Guinevere?

"This worship of the Queen,
That honor, too, wherein she holds him—this,
This was the sunshine that hath given the man
Growth, a name that branches o'er the rest,
And strength against all odds, and what the King
So prizes—overprizes—gentleness.
Her likewise would I worship as I might."

[175-181.]

And so beside his ideal knight he placed his ideal woman, Guinevere, to him the personification of purity and gentleness. And he asked as a favor that he might be permitted

to wear her crown upon his shield. To which the King replied,

“The crown is but the shadow of the King,
And this a shadow’s shadow, let him have it,
So this will help him of his violence.”

“No shadow,” said Balin, “O my Queen,
But light to me! No shadow, O my King,
But golden earnest of a gentler life!”

[199-204.]

And the crown of the gentle Queen which he carried on his shield, and her image which he carried in his heart, gave him power over Temper. Once when he half lifted his arm to strike a thrall, “the memory of that cognizance on his shield weighted it down,” and saved him from that violence. And once when he lifted a goblet to hurl it at the head of Garlon,

Through memory of that token on the shield
Relaxed his hold. “I will be gentle,” he thought,
“And passing gentle,” caught his hand away.

[364-366.]

And ever the crown and that for which it stood helped him to chain the tiger in his breast. Backed by these allies he fought hard with his lower self, struggling desperately with Temper, and seemed at length to have conquered.

And he might have conquered had there not been allies fighting on the side of Temper. First of the evil allies came Infidelity in the person of Lancelot and the Queen. Just when Balin felt that he had conquered his evil passion, one day he was sitting amid the shrubbery and flowers in the palace yard, when he witnessed a meeting between these two. He heard their words, and they seemed not

like the talk of queen and subject, but like the talk of damsel and lover. He saw the fire in Lancelot's eyes, and the flush on Guinevere's cheeks, and such looks as lovers lavish on each other. But ill he would not believe of them, rather would he discredit his own eyes and ears, rather believe himself were mad. Fleeing from the place, to himself he cried, "I see not what I see, hear not what I hear." Nevertheless, the scene awoke the slumbering demon within, and, raging with passion, he mounted and rode away, overthrown by Temper allied with Infidelity. Far through the woodlands he rode,

Now with slack rein and careless of himself,
Now with dug spur and raving at himself,
Now with drooped brow down the long glades he rode,
. . . blind and deaf to all
Save that chained rage which ever yelped within.

[304-314.]

His passion somewhat cooled and subdued, at length he came to the court of King Pellam, where he met a second ally of Temper, Insolence in the person of Garlon, the king's son. This foul-hearted profligate, insulting his guest and defaming the Queen, stirred up the tiger again. Seeing the crown on Balin's shield, he asked,

"Why wear ye that crown-royal?" Balin said,
"The Queen we worship, Lancelot, I, and all,
As fairest, best, and purest, granted me
To bear it!"

[343-346.]

Hissing, sneering, smiling in derision and scorn, Garlon made answer,

"Fairest I grant her—I have seen; but best,
Best, purest? thou from Arthur's hall, and yet

So simple! hast thou eyes, or if, are these
So far besotted that they fail to see
This fair wife-worship cloaks a secret shame?
Truly, ye men of Arthur be but babes."

[351-356.

It was then that Balin would have struck him with the cup had not the token on his shield held back his hand. And he let it suffice to rebuke the defamer and to praise the Queen and Lancelot. But in the night the insolence and scorn of Garlon rankled in his memory and stung him in his dreams. When morning dawned, he rose to depart, and meeting Garlon in the courtyard, fain would have passed him by. But when Garlon taunted him, sneering, "What, wear ye still that same crown-scandalous?" Balin's anger overcame him, and he drew his sword and smote the scorner, and felled him, and smote him yet again. And Temper aided by Insolence won the day.

Then Balin fled far into the forest, where he met a third ally of Temper, Sensualism incarnate in Vivien. He had hung his shield with its glittering crown upon the branch of a tree, determined never to wear it more, since he had shamed it so, and had cast himself down in utter humiliation upon the ground. Vivien, coming through the woodland, and seeing the crown, concluded the knight must be a prince from Arthur's hall. So she addressed him as Sir Prince, told him a false story of wrongs done to her, and besought his protection and guidance to Arthur's hall, concluding,

"I charge thee by that crown upon thy shield,
And by the great Queen's name, arise and hence."

[474-5.

To which Balin answered, passionately and fiercely,

“Thither no more! nor prince
Nor knight am I, but one that hath defamed
The cognizance she gave me. Here I dwell
Savage among the savage woods, here die—
Die—let the wolves’ black maws ensepulchre
Their brother beast, whose anger was his lord!
O me, that such a name as Guinevere’s,
Which our high Lancelot hath so lifted up,
And been thereby uplifted, should through me,
My violence and my villainy, come to shame.”

[477-486.

This was Vivien’s opportunity, and she was quick to seize it. This woman, herself impure, could not believe in the purity of man or woman. The platonic friendship which Lancelot and the Queen professed was to her incredible, only a cloak for sin, and Balin’s simple faith in it provoked from her lips a burst of laughter. She proceeded to disillusion him. To do so she lied, and made her youthful squire confirm the lies. She told of an amorous scene at Caerleon, which, they said, they had secretly witnessed, in which Lancelot and Guinevere compromised themselves. And Balin, though horror-stricken, remembering what he had witnessed at Camelot, believed the falsehood. Down went his two great ideals, away went the allies that had hitherto helped him so mightily, and up sprang his old enemy, Temper.

His evil spirit upon him leaped,
He ground his teeth together, sprang with a yell,
Tore from the branch and cast on earth the shield,
Drove his mailed heel athwart the royal crown,

Stamped all into defacement, hurled it from him
Among the forest weeds, and cursed the tale,
The told-of, and the teller.

[529-535.]

The field is lost, and Temper has won a complete and decisive victory. Sense has triumphed over Soul. But is it final? Is this the end of the warfare? Let us see.

Now Balan was lurking in that forest in quest of a villain, or man, or devil, who had treacherously murdered a knight of Arthur's hall, and who was called "the Demon of the Woods." When Balan heard the wild outcries and savage yells of Balin, he thought they could proceed from none other than this Demon of the Woods, so turned his horse's head in the direction whence they came. When he drew near, and saw Balin savagely trampling the shield under foot, not recognizing him, he thought,

"Lo! he hath slain some brother-knight,
And tramples on the goodly shield to show
His loathing of our Order and the Queen.
My quest, me seems, is here. Or devil or man
Guard thou thine head."

And with lance in place he made for his supposed enemy. Balin, finding himself attacked by an unknown foe, snatched a shield from the squire, and vaulted on his horse and met his adversary. Both went down, Balan wounded to the death by point of lance, Balin fatally crushed by his horse. Vivien's squire at her command opened their helmets, not for pity, but for curiosity to see what manner of men they were. Leaving them for dead, the temptress and her slave disappeared amid the trees. By and by the

brothers regained consciousness, and recognized each other. And Balin, dying, exclaimed,

“O brother, woe is me!
My madness all thy life has been thy doom,
Thy curse, and darkened all thy day; and now
The night has come. I scarce can see thee now.
Good-night! for we shall never bid again
Good-morrow. Dark my doom was here, and dark
It will be there. I see thee now no more.
I would not mine again should darken thine;
Good-night, true brother.”

[607-615.

And Balan, dying, answered low and tenderly,

“Good-night, true brother, here! good-morrow, there!
We were born together, and we die
Together by one doom!” and while he spoke
Closed his death-drowsing eyes, and slept the sleep
With Balin, either locked in either’s arm.

[615-619.

In the very hour of death Brotherly devotion came to the rescue, and put an arm of love around this defeated soldier of fortune, and drew him upward. Balan refused to believe that the victory of Sense was final, and that the defeated Soul was lost irretrievably. He held that the dark night of defeat would give way to a bright to-morrow of victory. And if we have his faith, we shall believe that he who fights with his evil nature so strenuously and desperately in this world, though overcome, shall rise again to conquer in that better world.

CHAPTER VI.

MERLIN AND VIVIEN; WISDOM VERSUS SENSUALISM.

In love, if love be love, if love be ours,
Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers:
Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all.

It is the little rift within the lute,
That by and by will make the music mute,
And ever widening slowly silence all.

The little rift within the lover's lute,
Or little pitted speck in garnered fruit,
That rotting inward slowly moulders all.

Merlin was the incarnation of intellect, he embodied the highest knowledge and wisdom of his day, he was "the most famous man of all those times," famous not as knight, but as magician, counselor, wise man. He

Knew the range of all their arts,
Had built the king his havens, ships, and halls,
Was also bard, and knew the starry heavens;
The people called him wizard.

[161-164.]

Vivien was the high priestess of sensualism. She was a hypocrite, backbiter, sensualist, seducer, demi-monde. The story of Merlin and Vivien delineates the conflict between

Wisdom represented by Merlin and Sensualism represented by Vivien. It describes what the poet calls

An ever-moaning battle in the mist,
World-war of dying flesh against the life.

[190-1.

It is the war of "flesh against the life," the bodily passions and appetites warring against the moral and spiritual life. Vivien striving to enthrall the wise man, and Merlin struggling to escape from her toils, is a parable of the strife between the flesh and the spirit. It is Wisdom versus Sensualism.

The poet draws a clear contrast between Wisdom and Sensualism. They differ in their manner of judging. Wisdom is charitable in its judgments, looking for the good rather than the bad, interpreting the actions of men in the most favorable way, casting the mantle of charity over the faults of others, and "finding the best that glimmers through the worst" of men. Merlin refused to believe the scandalous tales of the knights of the Round Table, mere rumor, or founded on slight pretext of suspicion. And when facts compelled him to believe ill of some one, still he judged not harshly, pitying rather than condemning. And this is the wise way. It is the way of Him who said, "Judge not that ye be not judged." It is the way of that love that "thinketh no evil." It was the way of Burns, who urges,

"Then gently scan your brother man. Still gentlier sister
woman;
Though they may gang a kennin wrang. To step aside is
human."

This was the spirit of Merlin, this is Wisdom's way of judging. But Sensualism, which in the language of the

Bible is synonymous with Folly, judges harshly, finds a verdict on the mere shadow of a suspicion, imagines evil where no evil exists, and imputes the worst of possible motives. Sensualism teaches its votaries to judge others by themselves. Being impure, they judge all their fellows impure. Being actuated by low motives, they impute low motives to others. Being base, they fain would believe all mankind base. As Merlin says,

“They that most impute a crime
Are pronest to it, and impute themselves,
Wanting the mental range, or low desire
Not to feel lowest makes them level all;
Yea, they would pare the mountain to the plain,
To leave an equal baseness; and in this
Are harlots like the crowd that if they find
Some stain or blemish in a name of note,
Not grieving that their greatest are so small,
Inflate themselves with some insane delight,
And judge all nature from her feet of clay,
Without the will to lift their eyes and see
Her godlike head crowned with spiritual fire,
And touching other worlds.”

[823-836.]

So judged Vivien. Unchaste herself, she could not believe there was chastity in man or woman. Readily did she believe the scandal of the court, and her imagination added to every tale and made it worse. She

Let her tongue
Rage like a fire among the noblest names,
Polluting, and imputing her whole self,
Defaming and defacing, till she left
Not even Lancelot brave nor Galahad clean.

[799-803.]

And herein lies another contrast between Wisdom and Sensualism. They differ in their speech. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Sensualism speaks to defame, to backbite, to slander, to drag down. "Face-flatterers and backbiters are the same," said Merlin, and such was Vivien. She smiled and spoke sweetly to one's face, but when his back was turned she stabbed him with insinuation and innuendo. She was a manufacturer and retailer of foul gossip. She belonged to the class described by St. Paul, "Whisperers, backbiters, inventors of evil things, without natural affection, unmerciful." She was what the Hebrew writer calls a whisperer. "The words of a whisperer," says the wise man, "are as dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts." Vivien whispered her scandal, and to purient minds her words were dainty morsels, and were greedily devoured, and they carried poison through the court.

Vivien half-forgotten of the Queen
Among her damsels broidering sat, heard, watched,
And whispered. Through the peaceful court she crept
And whispered; then, as Arthur in the highest
Leavened the world, so Vivien in the lowest,
Arriving at a time of golden rest,
And sowing one ill hint from ear to ear,
While all the heathen lay at Arthur's feet,
And no quest came, but all was joust and play,
Leavened his hall. They heard and let her be.

[135-144.]

"A whisperer separateth chief friends," and Vivien's whispering and scandal-mongering played no little part in corrupting and breaking up the Round Table. Quite different is the speech of Wisdom. "The law of kindness is in her tongue." She scorns backbiting and tale-bearing. She

detests slander and eschews foul gossip. She delights to speak well of people, and has a charitable word even for the erring and the evil ones. Such was the speech of Merlin, the wise man. Whom Vivien defames, he defends. She tells every evil report she has heard concerning the knights, and he protests their innocence. When she points the finger of scorn at Guinevere and Lancelot, though he is too sincere to deny their guilt, he speaks of it only with pity and sorrow. Of all the knights of Arthur's hall, whose faults and virtues he best knew, he said,

"I know the Table Round, my friends of old;
All brave, and many generous, and some chaste."

[814-815.]

While Sensuality speaks the language of malediction, Wisdom talks in the tongue of charity. Of either it may be said, "Thy speech betrayeth thee."

But the most fundamental difference between Wisdom and Sensualism consists in their philosophy of life. Life, says Sensualism, is for pleasure, for sensual enjoyment, for the gratification of animal appetites and natural desires. Vivien, the worshiper and priestess of Sensualism, sets forth its philosophy of life in her song of "the fire of heaven." It is a glorification of sensual appetite. "The fire from heaven she speaks of," says Stopford Brooke, "is not the holy fire of the pure spirit; it is the fire of that heaven which some have conceived, and which consists in the full enjoyment of desire." She sees this blaze of desire in the budding trees, the blooming flowers, the singing birds;

"The fire of heaven is on the dusty ways,
The wayside blossoms open to the blaze.
The whole wood-world is one full peal of praise.
The fire of heaven is not the flame of hell.

The fire of heaven is lord of all things good,
And starve not thou this fire within thy blood,
But follow Vivien through the fiery flood!
The fire of heaven is not the flame of hell!"

[*Balin and Balan*, 442-449.]

This is what life is for, it is to feed this fire, to enjoy these natural appetites to the full. This is Vivien's philosophy of life, this is the philosophy of Sensualism. Over against this stands Wisdom's conception of life. Wisdom protests against this false philosophy, asserting that who yields to the charm of Sensualism becomes "dead to life and use and name and fame." Life, says Wisdom, is for use, for service, for doing good to our fellows, for serving our day and generation. It is not for glory. Merlin told the story of a futile chase for the hart with the golden horns. The hunters met in a forest by a huge oak;

"While we waited, one, the youngest of us,
We could not keep him silent, out he flashed,
And into such a song, such fire for fame,
Such trumpet blowing in it, coming down
To such a stern and iron-clashing close,
That when he stopped we longed to hurl together,
And should have done it, but the beauteous beast
Scared by the noise upstarted at our feet,
And like a silver shadow slipped away
Through the dim land. And all day long we rode
Through the dim land against a rushing wind,
That glorious roundel echoing in our ears,
And chased the flashes of his golden horns
Until they vanished by the fairy well."

[413-426.]

Those who hold that life is for glory and follow after fame

will see their quarry, like the golden-antlered hart, slip away and vanish, and the chase of life will end in disappointment. One day Merlin found a youth who had carved a wooden shield, and was painting thereon his conception of life, a golden eagle flying toward the sun. It represented his youthful aspiration for glory. And Merlin

“Took his brush and blotted out the bird,
And made a gardener putting in a graff,
With this for motto, ‘Rather use than fame’.”

[476-478.]

This is what life is for, use, not fame. And yet fame hath its uses, and may be desired, not for its glory and its pleasure, but as a means to larger usefulness. Says Merlin,

“Fame with men,
Being but ampler means to serve mankind,
Should have small rest of pleasure in herself,
But work as vassal to the larger love
That dwarfs the petty love of one to one.
Use gave me fame at first, and fame again
Increasing gave me use.”

[486-492.]

Life, then, is neither for the lower selfishness which seeks satisfaction in the senses, nor for the higher selfishness which seeks satisfaction in glory, but it is for service. This is Wisdom's philosophy of life.

Let us now follow the thread of the narrative and trace the progress of this conflict. From the corrupt court of Mark comes Vivien to Arthur's hall to corrupt his court

and break up his Table Round. Having put the poison in their hearts,

As an enemy that has left
Death in the living waters and withdrawn,
The wily Vivien stole from Arthur's court.

[145-147.]

But she did not go alone. She had determined upon the downfall of Merlin, the Wise. At first he regarded her with disdain, then with amusement, and thus he grew tolerant of her presence, and was pleased with her flattery. And when Merlin, oppressed by a great melancholy, left the court, and embarked to depart, she went with him. When they landed she followed him far into the wild woods. And there she sought to learn from him a secret charm of which he had told her.

For Merlin once had told her of a charm,
With woven paces and with waving arms,
The which if any wrought on any one
The man so wrought on ever seemed to lie
Closed in the four walls of a hollow tower,
From which there was no escape forevermore,
Nor could he see but him who wrought the charm
Coming and going, and he lay as dead
And lost to life and use and name and fame.
And Vivien ever sought to work the charm
Upon the great enchanter of the time,
As fancying that her glory would be great
According to his greatness whom she quenched.

[203-215.]

To win her wish she used all her arts. She made pretence of love, but not for this would he tell the charm. Then she affected wounded love, and accused him of breach of faith and lack of trust, singing of the little rift that makes

the music mute, but this plea did not obtain the charm. Then she pretended jealousy, exclaiming,

“O, to what end, except a jealous one,
And one to make me jealous if I love,
Was this fair charm invented by yourself?
I well believe that all about this world
Ye cage a buxom captive here and there,
Closed in the four walls of a hollow tower,
From which is no escape forevermore.”

[536-542.]

But the wise man only smiled and kept the secret to himself. By and by in anger, upbraiding him with his unutterable unkindness, she turned from him, and fell to weeping. The woods grew darker by reason of the coming storm,

While his anger slowly died
Within him, till he let his wisdom go
For ease of heart, and half believed her true.

[889-891.]

In pity he drew her to shelter in the hollow oak, and the storm raged without. And still the temptress plied her arts. And when the storm had passed,

What should not have been had been,
For Merlin, overtalked and overworn,
Had yielded, told her all the charm, and slept.
Then, in one moment, she put forth the charm
Of woven paces and of waving hands,
And in the hollow oak he lay as dead,
And lost to life and use and name and fame.

Then crying, "I have made his glory mine,"
And shrieking out, "O fool!" the harlot leapt
Adown the forest, and the thicket closed
Behind her, and the forest echoed "fool."

[962-972.

The battle was over. The temptress had triumphed. Sensualism had won the victory. The wise man had turned fool, and was "lost to life and use and name and fame." Lost, because when Temptation met him, he tolerated her, grew familiar with her face, endured, then pitied, then embraced. Lost, because he forgot that in the moral realm

It is the little rift within the lute
That by and by will make the music mute,
And ever widening slowly silence all.

[388-390.

Lost to life, for he who has yielded to the seductions of sensualism is dead though yet alive. Lost to use, for the sensualist lives for self and for his lowest meanest self, and can add nothing to the wealth of humanity. Lost to name, for sensualism will tarnish the fairest name, and take from it the honor which once it rightly claimed, and make it a hissing and a reproach. Lost to fame, for sensualism is synonymous with shame, it blackens reputation, it brands its victim with the stigma of infamy and names him Ichabod. Those who yield, like Samson, are shorn of their strength, and blinded, and enslaved. Like Merlin, they become

Lost to life and use and name and fame.

CHAPTER VII.

LANCELOT AND ELAINE; PURITY VERSUS PASSION.

Loved her with all love except the love
Of man and woman when they love their best,
Closest and sweetest, and had died the death
In any knightly fashion for her sake.
And peradventure had he seen her first
She might have made this and that other world
Another world for the sick man; but now
The shackles of an old love straitened him,
His honor rooted in dishonor stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

Tennyson never wrote anything more pathetic and tender than this poem. It is exquisitely beautiful, yet exquisitely sad. It portrays a great soul struggling between two powerful motives, Lancelot, the greatest of Arthur's knights, standing between Guinevere, the Queen, and Elaine, the maiden of Astolat, debating and hesitating between the unlawful love of the one and the stainless love of the other. Guinevere and Elaine stand out on the poet's canvas in strong contrast. Both are beautiful, but they represent different types of beauty. Elaine is called the Lily Maid. The lily is her symbol. She, like the lily, is fair, stainless, immaculate, white-souled. Hers is the beauty of perfect purity. Of her emblems says Sir Lancelot,

"See, how perfect-pure! As light a flush
As hardly tints the blossom of the quince
Would mar their charm of stainless maidenhood."

[*Balin and Balan*, 261-263.]

As color would mar the beauty of the lily, so any stain of sensuality would mar the beauty of Elaine. She is the lily of womanhood. Guinevere is the rose, "deep-hued and many folded," rich in colors, heavy with fragrance, with a beauty that appeals to the senses and suggests passion rather than purity. Elaine has soul-beauty, Guinevere sense-beauty. And the characters of the two likewise stand in contrast. In the war of Sense against Soul, Elaine is on the side of the Soul. She is one in whom Soul is lord. In her Purity rules supreme. She embodies that saintly Chastity of which Milton says it is so dear to heaven

"That, when a soul is found sincerely so,
A thousand liveried angels lackey her,
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,
And in clear dream and solemn vision
Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear;
Till oft converse with heavenly habitants
Begins to cast a beam on the outward shape,
The unpolluted temple of the mind,
And turns it by degrees to the soul's essence,
Till all be made immortal."

She is Purity personified or rather incarnated. But Guinevere is on the side of Sense. In the warfare she has been overcome by Sense, and now is found fighting against Soul. In her Passion is dominant. In her heart she harbors and cherishes that unlawful desire, which as Milton also says, when it,

"By unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk,
But most by lewd and lavish act of sin,
Lets in defilement to the inward parts,
The soul grows clotted by contagion,
Embodies, and imbrutes till she quite lose
The divine property of her first being."

She is beautiful, brilliant, gentle, cultured, lovable, but unchaste. She is personified Passion.

This poem describes the contest between Passion and Purity for the possession of the citadel of Man-Soul. The heart of Lancelot is the battle-ground. Against Purity stands Passion with her allies,—Pleasure, Illicit Love, Unfaithful Fidelity, and Procrastination. Pleasure, though intended for man's good and a blessing when rightly used, is often debased and misused, and made to minister to the lusts of the flesh. And here, as oftentimes, Pleasure is found on the side of sin, fighting against right, urging the soul to yield to Passion. Lancelot found his highest pleasure in the company of the Queen. For that he would forego the delights of the chase and the tournament, for that he would turn deaf ear to the call of duty, for that he would stifle conscience and barter honor, for that he would turn his back upon Purity and embrace Passion.

And yet not for Pleasure alone. Lancelot was not a voluptuary. He was not like Gawain, who sought pleasure wherever it might be found, loving one maiden to-day and another to-morrow, despoiling every wayside flower of its sweetness to fill his cup of pleasure. Lancelot loved the Queen and her only. And this Illicit Love allied itself with Passion to battle against Purity for the possession of his soul. Lancelot allowed this Illicit Love to enter his heart, and yielded himself to it, and half excused himself, saying, that love is free and "free love will not be bound." A subtle fallacy that, and the more dangerous because of its subtlety. Love indeed cannot be bound against its will, it cannot be forced and constrained. But it can be restrained, controlled, guided. We may not indeed love (in this sense) whom we would, but we can keep ourselves from loving whom we would not love. To cherish marital

love for some one whom it were wrong so to love, and then to plead that love cannot be bound is confession of volitional and moral weakness unworthy of man or woman. This fallacy has been the ruin of many a life. Youths and maidens not yet bound, and men and women bound by marriage ties, need to recognize the power of the will over the affections and to assert that power and bring the affections under the dominion of the will directed by the moral nature. Had Lancelot done this, far otherwise would have been his life. But no, he surrendered to Illicit Love, and ruined his life, and the Queen's, and Arthur's, and many others, and wrought desolation to the realm. Ah, this world is strewn with the wrecks of manhood and womanhood that have been broken upon the rock of unchastity, lured thither by the sweet-songed siren of Illicit Love.

Another foe of Purity was what we may call the Unfaithful Fidelity of Lancelot.

His honor rooted in dishonor stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

[871-2.

Being enamored of the Queen, and having exchanged vows of affection and fidelity with her, his sense of honor held him in this dishonor. His fidelity kept him unfaithful. His fidelity to the Queen made him unfaithful to the King, and really unfaithful to the welfare and happiness of the Queen. He had been more faithful to her had he broken his pseudo-faith, renounced this dishonorable love, and left her heart free to return to him to whom in holy marriage she had pledged her love. This would have been truer honor, this would have been more faithful fidelity. But he allowed his Unfaithful Fidelity to hold him fast in the bondage of Passion. It made him "love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen." And when once, in one of his better

moments, he said to himself, "I needs must break these bonds that so defame me," he added, "Not without she wills it"—faithful to her in unfaithfulness. This is the same spirit which takes possession of those whose "sense of honor" impels them to dishonorable deeds, or those whose fidelity keeps them true to an unrighteous obligation, or those who feel obliged to keep a vow which they had no moral right to make and which would be better kept in its breach than its observance, or those whose constancy of character makes them loyal to an allegiance which ought to be broken. It is a bond which binds only noble souls, but one which the noblest souls will break, one which they must break or become ignoble.

And Lancelot, being noble, meant to break this bond, but another foe stood up against him and prevented the carrying out of his purpose till too late. That foe was Procrastination. Time after time Lancelot resolved to break the chains that bound him, but ever he postponed action till some other time. When he was sick from the wound received in the tournament, "full many a holy vow and pure resolve he made," but the resolution was for to-morrow, not for to-day. When Elaine had died for love of him, he was so moved that he determined to break the bonds—sometime—if the Queen willed it! And by and by, when the Queen saw the danger of exposure, and besought him to leave her and return to his own land, "Lancelot ever promised but remained." That evil spirit, Procrastination, ever whispered in his ear, "To-morrow, Lancelot, to-morrow thou shalt go." "Delays have dangerous ends," says the bard of Avon, and Lancelot found it so. He procrastinated till the dreaded exposure came, and himself and her he loved were shamed forever. His folly teaches us that we should

“Be wise to-day ; ’tis madness to defer ;
Next day the fatal precedent will plead ;
Thus on, till wisdom is pushed out of life.
Procrastination is the thief of time ;
Year after year it steals till all are fled,
And to the mercies of a moment leaves
The vast concerns of an eternal scene.”

[*Edward Young.*

Against passion are arrayed the friends and allies of Purity,—Friendship, Honor, Conscience, Religion, Legitimate Love. The Friendship between Lancelot and King Arthur uttered a silent protest against the breach of faith which Passion plead. How solemn the covenant of friendship made by these two on the battle-field ! The last great battle against the rebels had been fought, and the eagles of victory had perched on Arthur’s banner.

And in the heart of Arthur joy was lord.
He laughed upon his warrior whom he loved
And honored most. “Thou dost not doubt me king,
So well thine arm hath wrought for me to-day.”
“Sir and my liege,” he cried, “the fire of God
Descends upon thee in the battle-field.
I know thee for my king !” Whereat the two,
For each had warded either in the fight,
Swear on the field of death a deathless love.
And Arthur said, “Man’s word is God in man ;
Let chance what will, I trust thee to the death.”

[*Coming of Arthur, 123-133.*

It was like the old-time covenant of blood-brotherhood. After such a covenant as that how could Lancelot sin against Arthur ? Every word, every look of the blameless,

trustful King must have reproached the faithless friend, and condemned him for his sin. Sore was the battle within:

The great and guilty love he bare the Queen,
In battle with the love he bare his lord,
Had marred his face, and marked it ere his time.

[244-246.]

Honor upheld the cause of Purity; not that false "*sense of honor*" which was rooted in dishonor, but true Honor, that spotless reputation which is founded upon spotless character and noble deeds. Honor scorns falsehood and hypocrisy and treachery and unchastity, the vices which Passion engendered in the heart of Lancelot. Honor means

To honor his own word as if his God's,
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity.

[*Guinevere*, 470-1.]

"Honor," says Dr. Munger, "may be defined as an exquisite and imperative self-respect. Honor is an absolute and ultimate thing. The man of honor dies sooner than break its lightest behest. The man of honor may be trusted to the uttermost. It is akin to truth, but is more,—its aroma, its flower, its soul." Honor bound Lancelot to Purity by a triple tie; it bound him to be true to his word, and he had sworn to honor his word, and he had taken the vow of utter chastity. Lancelot, being knightly, loved Honor, and fain would have cherished her, and would have given her a home in his heart. But when he needs must choose between Passion and Honor, he elects Passion and lets Honor go.

Conscience, too, fought valiantly for Purity. It put thorns upon the rose of Passion. It mingled wormwood

with the cup of Pleasure. It made harsh discord in the music of Illicit Love. It showed how faithless was False Fidelity, and how empty was dishonorable honor. It filled the heart of Lancelot with a great remorse ;

His mood was often like a fiend, and rose
And drove him into wastes and solitudes
For agony, who was yet a living soul.

[250-2.

It was Conscience which made him feel that his own name shamed him and reproached him. It was Conscience which cried out,

"Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man
Not after Arthur's heart!"

[1408-09.

It was Conscience which stung him and made him "groan in remorseful pain." It was Conscience which drove him into madness, and "whipt him into waste fields far away," where he was "beaten down by little men." It was Conscience which, at the seashore, stung him to desperation, and he said,

"I will embark and I will lose myself,
And in the great sea wash away my sin."

[*The Holy Grail*, 802-3.

But he found he could not wash away his sin in the sea, neither could he fly from Conscience. This faithful monitor stayed ever with him, denouncing Passion, pleading for Purity.

On the side of Purity stood, also, Religion. Lancelot had been brought up in the nurture of that pure and undefiled Religion which means "to keep oneself unspotted from

the world." The Lady of the Lake is a personification of Religion, and of himself Lancelot says,

"Lancelot, whom the Lady of the Lake
Caught from his mother's arms—the wondrous one
Who passes through the vision of the night—
She chanted snatches of mysterious hymns
Heard on the winding waters, eve and morn
She kissed me, saying, "Thou art fair, my child,
As a king's son,' and often in her arms
She bare me, pacing on the dusky mere."

[1393-1400.

In childhood he had been nurtured on the bosom of Religion, and in manhood he remembered her mysterious hymns, her tokens of love, her admonitions, and her gentle ministrations. The Holy Grail was Religion's ideal of perfect purity of heart, and Lancelot's quest of the Grail symbolized his longing and vain struggling toward Purity. The Holy Grail was but Religion beckoning to him to forsake Passion and attain Purity.

The above aspects of the struggle are portrayed in various parts of the *Idylls*. But the main purpose of this poem is to set forth the part taken by Legitimate Love. It is the pure love of a virtuous woman pitted against the Illicit Love of the Queen. Arthur had found a crown set with nine diamonds, and once a year for eight years he had given a grand joust with a diamond for the prize. And Lancelot each time had won the prize, and was planning to make the tale complete and present the cluster to the Queen. When the last joust was appointed to contend for the central and largest diamond, Lancelot went not with the other knights, but feigned sickness and remained behind. But after they were gone, he determined to go incognito. He lost his way in the forest and came to the

castle of Astolat. Here he was hospitably received, and here he met the Lily Maid, Elaine. She looked upon him "and loved him with that love which was her doom." He left his shield in her keeping, and borrowed that of her brother, Sir Torre, lest the lions on his shield should reveal his identity. The simple-hearted maiden asked him to wear her token on his helmet at the joust, a red sleeve broidered with pearls. And he granted her request, partly to please her, partly to better conceal his identity, for never yet had he worn a token for any lady. Elaine kept the shield,

Fashioned for it
A case of silk, and braided thereupon
All the devices blazoned on the shield
In their own tinct, and added of her wit
A border fantasy of branch and flower,
And yellow-throated nestling in the nest,

[7-12.

and in the loom of fancy wove about every dint and scratch upon the shield a wondrous romance, and "so she lived in fantasy." Lancelot with Sir Lavaine, her brother, went to the joust, and Lancelot won the prize, but, sore wounded, hastened away and took refuge in a hermit's cave. There Elaine came to him, nursed him, ministered to him as only a gentle woman can,

Meeker than any child to a rough nurse,
Milder than any mother to a sick child,
And never woman yet, since man's first fall,
Did kindlier unto man, but her deep love
Upbore her.

[852-7.

Her loving devotion, her maidenly modesty, her unconscious innocence, won his admiration and, in a measure, his love. He

Would listen for her coming and regret
Her parting step, and held her tenderly
And loved her with all love except the love
Of man and woman when they love their best,
Closest and sweetest, and had died the death
In any knightly fashion for her sake—
And peradventure had he seen her first
She might have made this and that other world
Another world for the sick man; but now
The shackles of an old love straitened him.

[860-870.]

Mightily did the maiden's love contend against the adulterous love that shackled his soul. And sometimes it seemed to have won till the bright image of another face came between him and the Lily Maid and "dispersed his resolution like a cloud." When he was convalescent he went to Astolat to rest awhile. And there he insisted that Elaine should ask some favor of him, some goodly gift, to repay her for her kindness. And said he,

"Do not shun
To speak the wish most near to your true heart;
Such service have ye done me that I make
My will yours."

[907-911.]

But she had given her love, her life, and there is only one thing that can repay love. And that her maidenly modesty forbade her to ask. And still Lancelot tarried to

learn her wish. One morning he found her among the garden trees, and said to her,

“Delay no longer, speak your wish,
Seeing I go to-day.”

[919-920.

And then suddenly, passionately, she uttered her wish—it leaped from her heart, she could not help it;

“Your love,” she said, “your love, to be your wife.”

[928.

Ah, had it not been for that other love, that love born of Passion and sealed by secret sin, far otherwise would have been the answer of Lancelot. But he could only say,

“Had I chosen to wed,
I had been wedded earlier, sweet Elaine;
But now there never will be wife of mine.”

Other favors he offered her, even to the half of his realm but she replied, “Of all this will I nothing,” and swooning fell. And Lancelot took his departure.

Elaine was stricken to the death, and she knew that she must die. Death like the voice of a friend called to her, and she harkened to the call, and welcomed death. Her memory carried her back to childhood when her brothers used to take her in the boat up the river and she would cry because they would never pass the poplar tree and on to the palace of the king. And the old wish came back to her, and she asked that they would let her go and pass beyond the tree, and far up the river to the palace. But it was not in life she meant to make this strange voyage. She sent for the priest and prepared for death. She asked Levaine to write a letter as she dictated. Then she asked her father to lay the letter in her hand as she was dying.

Slowly she faded away. On the eleventh morning her father put the letter in her hand and she died. And they placed her body on the boat, kissed her brows, and said farewell.

Then rose the dumb old servitor, and the dead,
Oared by the dumb, went upward with the flood—
In her right hand the lily, in her left

The letter.

[1146-1150.]

Lancelot had just given the diamonds to the Queen, and she, jealous of Elaine, had flung them into the river. While Lancelot gazed at the rippled surface, disdainfully, remorsefully, right under his eyes and across the spot where the diamonds had fallen came the barge with its fair burden, and on to the palace doorway. Then came Arthur and commanded the meek Sir Percivale and the pure Sir Galahad to bear the maiden form into the hall. And Arthur saw the letter and took it and read it; it was a letter of love and farewell to Lancelot. It was a voice from the bier calling the great knight to Purity.

Arthur gave command that she should be buried like a queen. And Lancelot followed in the train, "sad beyond his wont." For the fair face on the bier told of a love tenderer and purer and truer than his Queen's, and the silent lips plead more eloquently than ever for his love, and in death the Lily Maid called him from Passion to Purity. And Arthur said,

"Let her tomb

Be costly, and her image thereupon,
And let the shield of Lancelot at her feet
Be carven, and her lily in her hand.
And let the story of her dolorous voyage
For all true hearts be blazoned on her tomb
In letters gold and azure."

[1328-1335.]

One day Lancelot went to meet the Queen in the palace garden. But the lilies caught his eye and reminded him of Elaine, and he turned aside. The Queen followed, and reproached him for his discourtesy, saying, "Ye stand as in a dream."

Then Lancelot with his hand among the flowers;
"Yea,—for a dream. Last night methought I saw
That maiden Saint who stands with lily in hand
In yonder shrine. All round her pressed the dark,
And all the light upon her silver face
Flowed from the spiritual lily that she held.
Lo! these her emblems drew mine eyes—away."

[*Balin and Balan*, 254-260.]

It was Purity still battling with Passion. It was Love calling to him from the grave, nay, calling from that other world, calling him to repentance and to holiness of life. And though Passion long triumphed, Purity finally won the day, for Lancelot "died a holy man."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOLY GRAIL; THE QUEST OF THE IDEAL.

And four great zones of sculpture, set betwixt
With many a mystic symbol, gird the hall;
And in the lowest beasts are slaying men,
And in the second men are slaying beasts,
And on the third are warriors, perfect men,
And on the fourth are men with growing wings,
And over all one statue in the mould
Of Arthur, made by Merlin, with a crown,
And peaked wings pointed to the Northern Star.

According to the old romances, the Holy Grail was the vessel used at the last supper in the Upper Room. Joseph of Arimathæa went into the room after the supper and took away this vessel. And on the morrow he received therein the last drops of blood from the wounds of Jesus. And the Grail with its precious blood he carried into England and kept it there in a church at Glastonbury. When he died or soon thereafter the Holy Grail disappeared, to be seen henceforth only by the pure in heart. And holy maidens, by fastings and prayers, and knights by deeds of valor and quests of noble adventure, sought for the vision of the Grail. In Tennyson's story the vision is seen first by a nun, sister of Percivale. The description is so exquisitely beautiful that I give it in the words of the poet. Said the nun to Percivale,

“Sweet brother, I have seen the Holy Grail;
For, waked at night, I heard a sound

As of a silver horn from o'er the hills
Blown, and I thought, 'It is not Arthur's use
To hunt by moonlight.' And the slender sound
As from a distance beyond distance grew
Coming upon me—O never harp nor horn,
Nor ought we blow with breath, or touch with hand,
Was like that music as it came; and then
Streamed through my cell a cold and silver beam.
And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail,
Rose-read with beatings in it, as if alive,
Till all the white walls of my cell were dyed
With rosy colors leaping on the wall;
And then the music faded, and the Grail
Past, and the beam decayed, and from the walls
The rosy quiverings died into the night."

[107-123.]

In this poem the Grail is intended to have an allegorical meaning. But it is not easy to say precisely what significance we should give it. Like most allegories and parables, it is capable of various interpretations, and which the author had in mind it is difficult to determine. The reader is prone to interpret it according to the bent of his own mind. It stands for asceticism, or for fanaticism, or for superstition, or for sensuous religion, or for purity, or for the ideal, according to the fancy of the reader. Even in the story, the Grail did not mean the same to all who sought it. To some it was only a marvel, a miracle which they fain would see for curiosity and for the name of it. To others it was a blessed vision of the blood of Christ, and symbolized purity of soul and union with Christ. "Out of the mystical twilight which envelopes the action," says Henry VanDyke, "this truth emerges: that those knights who thought of the Grail as only an external won-

der, a miracle which they fain would see because others had seen it, 'followed wandering fires;' while those to whom it became a symbol of inward purity and grace, like Galahad and Percivale and even the dull, honest, simple-minded Bors and the sin-tormented Lancelot, finally attained unto the vision." I would say, then, that the quest of the Grail by the sensually minded like Gawain symbolizes the following after the superstitious and sensuous forms of religion, and that the quest of the Grail by the spiritually minded like Galahad, Percivale, Bors, and even Lancelot, symbolizes the quest of the ideal, the aspiration of the soul after purity, after perfection, after communion with God. The chief lessons of the poem are brought out in the experiences of the knights who sought and found the Grail and in the experience of Arthur who sought it not.

Percivale relates the story to his fellow monk, Ambrosius. After the knights had sworn the vow to ride twelve months and a day in quest of the Grail, they departed every one his own way. Percivale, alone, rode forth with light heart, exulting in his prowess, and confident of success. But when he thought of his sins, of his unworthiness, his heart failed him, and he despaired of the quest. Consumed with a raging thirst, he saw a rippling brook and goodly apples on the bank, and he thought, "I will give up the quest, I will content myself with the brook and the fruit and the shady lawn." But while he drank the water and ate the fruit, suddenly they all turned to dust, and he was left in a desert with his thirst insatiate. Then he saw a beautiful house, and a kind woman, and a child, and she rose to welcome him. And despairing of the quest, he thought to tarry there. But when he touched the woman she turned to nothingness, and there remained only a broken shed and a dead babe; and these, too, fell into dust, and he was left alone with his thirst unsatisfied.

Then he met a knight in golden armor, with a crown of gold and jewels, riding a steed bedecked with gold and jewels. And the knight opened his arms to receive Percivale, but, when touched, the knight with his gold and jewels fell into dust, and he was left alone, "wearying in a land of sand and thorns." Then he came to a city on a hill, and he heard a multitude at the gates, and they bade him welcome and hailed him mightiest and purest among men. And he thought to tarry in the city and accept their homage, but when he climbed the hill he found only desolate ruins. And he cried,

"Lo, if I find the Holy Grail itself
And touch it, it will crumble into dust!"

[438-9.

These phantoms are an allegory. Percivale's thirst is the soul's yearning after the spiritual need. The rippling brook and goodly apples signify the pleasures of sense, which satisfy the physical appetites. The woman, the child, the house, represent home and the joys of domestic life. The knight in golden armor is a personification of wealth. And the homage of the city on the hill is fame and position and power. The truth set forth in this allegory is that the things of earth,—pleasure, earthly love, wealth, fame, power,—cannot satisfy the deepest thirst of the soul. Nothing but the attainment of the spiritual ideal can satisfy this spiritual thirst. From this desolate hill of fame, Percivale dropped into the lowly vale of humiliation, and there he found a holy hermit who told him why he had not seen the Grail;

"O son, thou hast not true humility,
The highest virtue, mother of them all;
For when the Lord of all things made Himself

Naked of glory for His mortal change,
'Take thou my robe,' she said, 'for all is thine,'
And all her form shone forth with sudden light
So that the angels were amazed, and she
Followed Him down, and like a flying star
Led on the gray-haired wisdom of the east.
But her thou hast not known; for what is this
Thou thoughtest of thy prowess and thy sins?
Thou has not lost thyself to save thyself
As Galahad."

[445-457.]

Then came Galahad, and with Galahad he saw the Grail afar off. The experience of Percivale teaches that the vision of the ideal is hidden by pride and vain-glory, and by morbid reflection on one's sins and imperfections. Neither self-exaltation nor despair is the way thereto. The road to its attainment is through the valley of humility. Truly, "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

In Arthur's hall was a mysterious chair, fashioned by Merlin, the magician, who called it the Siege Perilous. "For there," said Merlin, "no man could sit but he should lose himself." And Merlin unintentionally sat in this chair, and so lost himself. But Galahad said, "If I lose myself, I find myself," and so sat down in the Seat Perilous and saw the Holy Grail. This allegorical chair is the seat of self-forgetfulness. Merlin forgot himself in the thought of sensualism, and "was lost to life and use and name and fame." Galahad forgot himself in the thought of Christ and holiness, and lost self, but saved himself. And henceforth the vision of the Grail was ever with him, night and day,

"Fainter by day, but always in the night
Blood-red, and sliding down the blackened marsh

Blood-red, and on the naked mountain top
 Blood-red, and in the sleeping mere below
 Blood-red. And in the strength of this I rode,
 Shattering all evil customs everywhere,
 And past through Pagan realms, and made them mine,
 And clashed with Pagan hordes, and bore them down,
 And broke through all, and in the strength of this
 Come victor." [471-481.

And led on by the glorious vision, he crossed the mystic bridge, and embarked upon the mysterious ocean, and went to be crowned king in the spiritual city. The lesson of Galahad's experience is that the ideal is attained through self-forgetfulness. The soul must lose itself and forget itself in Christ, it must be hid with Christ in God. As Jesus declares, "He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it." When Love takes up the harp of life, and smites the chord of self, which trembles in music out of sight, then, and only then, comes the heavenly vision.

Sir Bors is the type of the plain, commonplace, unimaginative, but honest, faithful, loyal-hearted man. He could hardly be said to have gone in quest of the Grail. So little did he esteem himself that he scarcely dared hope to see it. One day Sir Lancelot crossed his path, riding furiously, driven mad by conscience. And Bors was so grieved for the affliction of his kinsman that

He well had been content
 Not to have seen, so Lancelot might have seen,
 The Holy Cup of healing; and, indeed,
 Being so clouded with his grief and love,
 Small heart was his after the holy quest.
 If God would send the vision, well; if not,
 The quest and he were in the hand of Heaven.

[650-656.

Among the heathen he rode, and there he was seized and bound and thrust into a dungeon of stones. And in the night a stone fell from his prison wall, and through the opening he saw the Seven Stars;

“And then to me, to me,”

Said good Sir Bors, “beyond all hopes of mine,
Who scarce had prayed or asked it for myself—
Across the seven clear stars—O grace to me!—
In color like the fingers of a hand
Before a burning taper, the sweet Grail
Glided and past, and close upon it pealed
A sharp, quick thunder.”

[686-693.

Sir Bors wished for the vision for another more than for himself. In self-renunciation he found the Holy Grail. His experience teaches that altruism or brotherly love is a condition of attaining the spiritual ideal. As long as we desire it and pursue it for ourselves alone we shall not find it, we shall not even see it from afar. But when we seek the beatitude for our fellows also, then indeed we shall find it. “Heaven’s gate,” says Whittier, “is shut to him who comes alone.” And heaven’s windows, too, are closed to him who asks for the outpouring of the blessings upon his own heart only. Only the altruistic eye can see the vision of the true ideal, and enjoy its benediction.

Lancelot also had sworn the vow. Tormented by remorse for his sin, he sought the Grail with a vague hope it might deliver him from his sins. Virtue and vice had grown together in his heart like two flowers, a wholesome and a poisonous, so intertwined that it seemed to him they could not be plucked apart. But a holy man had told him that except they could be plucked asunder his quest was vain. And as he strove to tear the two apart, his madness

came upon him. He came to the seashore and embarked, and seven days was driven over the storm-tossed sea. He came to the enchanted castle of Carbonek. Passing the lions who guarded the entrance, he climbed the stairway of the hall tower till he came to a door. What he saw and heard we will let him relate ;

“A light was in the crannies, and I heard,
‘Glory and joy and honor to our Lord
And to the Holy Vessel of the Grail!’
Then in my madness I essayed the door ;
It gave, and through a stormy glare, a heat
As from a seven-times-heated furnace, I,
Blasted and burnt, and blinded as I was,
With such a fierceness that I swooned away—
O yet methought I saw the Holy Grail,
All palled in crimson samite, and around
Great angels, awful shapes, and wings and eyes !
And but for all my madness and my sin,
And then my swooning, I had sworn I saw
That which I saw ; but what I saw was veiled
And covered, and this quest was not for me.”

[835-849.

The lesson of his experience is plain. Sin blinds our eyes to the vision of the ideal. If sin be in our hearts the ideal is veiled and covered. If we look for it, we see it but dimly, imperfectly, vaguely, and we know not whether we see it or not. Only the pure in heart can see God. Only through renunciation of sin, and the cleansing power of the Divine Spirit can we attain unto the ideal. Only through spiritual eyes can we see the spiritual vision. “The unspiritual man,” says St. Paul, “receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God : for they are foolishness unto

him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged."

Arthur did not go in quest of the Grail. Duty held him at his post. When some one intimated that had he seen what the rest had seen he, too, had sworn the vow, he replied,

"Not easily, seeing the King must guard
That which he rules, and is but as the hind
To whom a space of land is given to plow,
Who may not wander from the allotted field
Before his work be done, but, being done,
Let visions of the night or of the day
Come as they will."

[901-907.]

With him duty comes first, ideals and visions second. He, too, seeks and finds the ideal, but not as Galahad. Galahad sees a mystical vision, and turns aside from the ordinary duties of life to follow the vision. And being a mystic, and being sincere and pure in heart, he finds the ideal, and in the ideal he finds the real. Arthur finds the ideal in the real. He finds it in the common, plain duties of life. As he goes forward in the performance of his God-appointed work, the ideal is revealed to him, he sees the spiritual world all about him, visions come to him,

"Until this earth he walks on seems not earth,
This light that strikes his eyeball is not light,
This air that smites his forehead is not air
But vision—yea, his very hand and foot—
In moments when he feels he cannot die,
And knows himself no vision to himself,
Nor the high God a vision, nor that One
Who rose again."

[908-915.]

This, according to Tennyson, is the better way for most of us. A few mystical souls may indeed be justified in following some visionary ideal; the world needs a few such idealists. But such a quest is not for all. Most of us are far wiser to seek the ideal, not in the visionary, but in the real, in the plain duty that lies near at hand. The religion of common sense and of common life is the religion for us common people. The ethical ideal rather than some mystical ideal should be the object of our quest. And if this we follow, we, too, shall attain the spiritual ideal. The path of duty is the way to spiritual glory.

“He that walks it, only thirsting
For the right, and learns to deaden
Love of self, before his journey closes,
He shall find the stubborn thistle bursting
Into glossy purple, which outredden
All voluptuous garden roses.
He, that ever following her commands,
On with toil of heart and knees and hands,
Through the long gorge to the far light has won
His path upward and prevailed,
Shall find the toppling crags of Duty scaled
Are close upon the shining table-lands
To which our God Himself is sun and moon”

[*Tennyson: Death of Wellington.*]

CHAPTER IX.

PELLEAS AND ETTARRE; INNOCENCE VERSUS WICKEDNESS.

A rose, but one, none other rose had I,
A rose, one rose, and this was wondrous fair,
One rose, a rose that gladdened earth and sky,
One rose, my rose, that sweetened all mine air—
I cared not for the thorns; the thorns were there.

One rose, a rose to gather by and by,
One rose, a rose to gather and to wear.
No rose but one—what other rose had I?
One rose, my rose; a rose that will not die—
He dies who loves it—if the worm be there.

The quest of the Grail had made many gaps in the Table Round. Of those who had gone on the quest scarce a tithe had returned. Of those who found the vision, one had gone into the Spiritual City, another into a monastery. Of those who found it not, most had wandered far into other lands, leaving the welfare of the realm to other hands to guard. To fill the vacant places, King Arthur made new knights. Among these was Pelleas, an ingenuous youth, innocent, simple-hearted, trustful, pure in heart, and thinking no evil. Soon after he was knighted, Arthur announced a tournament, and the prizes for the winner were a golden circlet and a sword. Pelleas was on his way to this tournament when he met Ettarre with her train of damsels and knights. They, too, had started to the tour-

nement, but had lost their way. Ettarre asks Pelleas to guide them to their destination, and he gladly consents. He is heart-free, but he has long been in love with an ideal maiden. When he looks upon Ettarre he sees in her his ideal, and at once becomes enamored.

The beauty of her flesh abashed the boy,
As though it were the beauty of her soul;
For as the base man, judging of the good,
Puts his own baseness in him by default
Of will and nature, so did Pelleas lend
All the young beauty of his own soul to hers.

[74-79.]

He judged her character by her physical appearance. Because she was beautiful in face and form he judged her beautiful in soul. He learned afterwards to his sorrow that he had misjudged her, that the fair face concealed an ugly soul. His folly should teach us not to make the same mistake. It will not do to judge by the outward appearance. There may be poison in the heart of the most beautiful flower. There may be "A goodly apple rotten at the core." And there may be a goodly kernel concealed by the prickly burr. A diamond of the first water may appear only an unsightly pebble. Cleopatra was one of the most beautiful of women, but one of the vilest. Abe Lincoln was one of the homeliest of men, but one of the noblest. The fair-appearing man may be a scoundrel, the ugly-featured man may be a saint. The angelic-looking woman may be foul-hearted, the homely one an angel. There are many who "outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of all uncleanness." If, therefore, we would avoid the mistake of Pelleas we must "judge not according to appearance."

Pelleas escorts Ettarre to Caerleon, and on the way she

smiles upon him and makes him her slave. She covets the golden circlet and the glory of being named "Queen of Beauty" at the tournament. She pretends to love Pelleas, and boldly asks him to win the prize for her, promising her love as his reward. He contends, wins the prize, and bestows it upon her. Thenceforth she is gracious to him no longer. She has no further use for the raw youth, and fain would be rid of him. But he is not easily disposed of. He follows her to her castle, and when locked out watches before her gates. Though insulted, he refuses to be rebuffed, and takes it all as trial of his love. Finally she has him bound, he yielding to the humiliation for love's sake, and thrusts him out of her gates. He has served her purpose, he has won the circlet, he has obtained for her the ambition she wished, now let him begone! The way she used him seems so mean and contemptible that we would not believe such possible did we not see it in real life. We see it in the maiden who flirts with a youth, for the mere pleasure of the hour, and sends him away with a wounded heart and with faith in womanhood shattered. We see it in the youth who plays with a woman's heart as with a toy, and tosses it from him when tired of his plaything. We see it in all who debase the sacred relations of friendship and love to sensual and sordid and selfish purposes. We see it in all who use their fellows as mere steps on which to climb to selfish success. Kant interprets the Golden Rule to mean, "treat humanity ever as an end, never as a means, to thy own selfish ends." Ettarre treated Pelleas as a mere means to her own selfish ends, and so disobeyed the Law of Love.

At the time of Pelleas's final rebuff Gawain appears upon the scene. He is the type of the fickle-hearted man. He was called "light-of-love." It was not his nature "to love one maiden only, cleave to her, and worship her by years of

noble deeds," until he had won her for his wife. In his eyes one beautiful woman was just as lovable as another, and he shifted his affections as oft as his eyes gazed upon some new attraction. Not only was he light in love, but loose in morals. The honor and virtue of womanhood were little esteemed by him, and carelessly trampled under foot to gratify his pleasure. He was faithless, too, to his friends. He proved traitor to Pelleas. Pretending friendship and proffering help, he is utterly false. Learning from Pelleas of his rebuff, he offers to go to Ettarre and sing his praises in her ears till she shall wish him back. Instead he wins her for himself, not in true love, but in its shameful counterfeit. And yet this man was not without a "sense of honor." He had his standard of honor. When he saw three knights attacking Pelleas, that to him was villainous, and through his heart flashed "the fire of honor and all noble deeds." What a sense of honor is this which burns with indignation at the evil in others but is blind to the baseness in one's own heart! Gawain even chides Pelleas for defaming the brotherhood of knighthood in allowing himself to be bound by the cravens he had overthrown. He did not realize that he himself was held by bonds far more shameful, and that he was ever defaming the brotherhood by his life. And yet this knight was the flower of courtesy. In politness he was par excellence. He had the bearing of a noble knight and the manners of a gentleman. This is a true picture from life. After all is said of the value of courtliness and the relation of good manners to good morals, still it is possible for the false and the lewd to hide his character under the manners of a gentleman. Let us learn from Gawain this lesson: manners are not morals, courtliness is not character, politeness is not a *prima facie* proof of purity;—all this may be "but the guiled shore to a most dangerous sea."

Gawain not returning at the promised time, Pelleas at night enters the unguarded gates and goes to investigate for himself. All within are asleep, and in a gay pavilion he finds Gawain and Ettarre sleeping side by side. Impelled to slay the guilty pair, he resists the temptation, lays his sword across their throats, and goes forth into the darkness. His ideal is shattered, his love is blasted, his faith in man and woman is well-nigh murdered, he doubts whether there is any truth and honor and goodness in all the world, and he is wild with grief and rage and disappointment and despair. In this state of mind he meets Percivale,—Percivale, the pure; Percivale, the idealist; he who has seen the Holy Grail. Surely here is the man to rescue the youth from his despair and madness! He can tell him of one woman who is pure, of more than one knight who is true and chaste, of the great King whose integrity is unshaken and whose honor is untarnished,—ah, he can tell of his vision of the Grail, symbol of an ideal attainable and attained. But Percivale sadly fails to rise to the opportunity. Instead of lifting the youth out of his darkness and despair, he plunges him still deeper therein. By his insinuations and his silences, he adds fuel to the flame. He makes Pelleas believe that the Queen and Lancelot and all the knights of the Table Round are false, and even bears no clear testimony to the King. He who had seen the glorious vision holds out no beacon light to his fellow stumbling in the darkness. And because of his default, Pelleas is plunged the deeper in the gulf of dark despair. The lesson for us is plain. It behooves us to go to the help of the souls that have been worsted in the conflict with the wickedness of the world. If there is in our hearts any vestige of doubt, despair, pessimism, we should resolutely hide it. And whatever we have of faith, of hope, of aspiration, of idealism, of optimism, we should share

with our fellows. If we have faith, let us impart it to others; if we have hope, let us inspire it in others; if we have caught the vision of a noble ideal, let us point others thereto. Thus shall we rescue souls that are sinking in doubt and despair.

Pelleas vaults upon his horse and furiously rides towards Camelot. Near the gates he meets and challenges Lancelot, who is riding forth gaily, all forgetful of his sins. Says Lancelot,

“What name hast thou
That ridest here so blindly and so hard?”
“No name, no name,” he shouted, “a scourge am I
To lash the treasons of the Table Round.”
“Yea, but thy name?” “I have many names,” he cried;
“I am wrath and shame and hate and evil flame,
And like a poisonous wind I pass to blast
And blaze the crime of Lancelot and the Queen.”
“First over me,” said Lancelot, “shalt thou pass.”
[551-559.]

They fight and Pelleas is overthrown. Defiantly he courts death, but Lancelot bids him rise. Slowly and sadly Lancelot rides back to Camelot and Pelleas follows. At the same moment they enter the Hall where sits the Queen with her knights and ladies. Pelleas does not greet the Queen, but only scowls. Seeing the dark countenance of the young knight, she speaks kindly to him, offering her sympathy and help.

But Pelleas lifted up an eye so fierce
She quailed, and he, hissing, “I have no sword,”
Sprang from the door into the dark.

[589-591.]

And this is the last we hear of him. Dark-souled, he goes out into the darkness, and is lost in the black night of despair and misanthropy. But he leaves behind him gloom and fearful forboding. The guilty Queen

Looked hard upon her lover, he on her,
And each foresaw the dolorous day to be;
And all talk died, as in a grove all song
Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey.
Then a long silence came upon the hall,
And Modred thought, "The time is hard at hand."

[592-597.]

The harvest of sin is near at hand. The guilt of Lancelot and Guinevere is about to reap the terrible harvest of shame and sorrow and national woe. Their example has corrupted society, and a corrupt society has ruined the life of Pelleas. But the day of vengeance is at hand.

This idyll is but a continuation of the story of the war of Sense against Soul. It represents a pure soul struggling in the toils of a debased society. It pictures Innocence at war with Wickedness. Ettarre represents a godless society where truth and purity and honor are unknown, where the Sense rules supreme, and where Innocence is an unwelcome guest. Pelleas personifies Innocence joined to simplicity, Innocence inexperienced, ignorant of the ways of the world. When the disillusionment comes, he is not able to stand the shock and goes down in defeat. The idyll is Tennyson's picture of the balefulness of a godless, sensual society. It is his warning against the evil of sensualism to the individual, to society, and to the state.

CHAPTER X.

THE LAST TOURNAMENT; THE SIGNS OF NATIONAL DECAY.

"Is it then so well?

Or mine the blame that oft I seem as he
Of whom was written, 'A sound was in his ears'?
The foot that loiters, bidden go—the glance
That only seems half loyal to command—
A manner somewhat fallen from reverence—
Or have I dreamed the bearing of our knights
Tells of a manhood ever less and lower?
Or whence the fear lest this my realm, upreared
By noble deeds at one with noble vows,
From flat confusion and brute violences,
Reel back into the beast, and be no more?"

It is the eve of the nation's downfall. Events are hastening to a close. The tragic end of the Round Table and the kingdom is near at hand. This idyll is a melancholy picture of a nation toppling on the brink of ruin. With artistic skill the poet paints a melancholy day, and throws over it a shadow of gloom. The season is autumn, and the fading leaves symbolize the fading glory of the nation. The day is threatening, gustful, cloudy, ending in drenching rain. There is gloom in the heart of the Queen, who unconsciously sighs as she watches the King ride away, and "in her bosom pain is lord." There is gloom in the heart of Lancelot, who moves to the lists "with slow, sad steps," sits languidly in the umpire's chair, "sighing wearily, as one who sits and gazes on a faded fire." There

is gloom in the heart of Arthur, who has a premonition of coming evil and is weighted down with

“The fear lest this my realm, upreared
By noble deeds at one with noble vows,
From flat confusion and brute violences,
Reel back into the beast, and be no more.”

[122-125.]

It was a dolorous day, for the realm was indeed reeling back into the beast, and soon would be no more. And in this idyll we read the signs of national decay.

There was a brazen contempt for law and authority. This is shown in the story of that quondam knight of Arthur's who set up a Round Table of his own in opposition to that of the King, a knighthood of villainy and lust and shame, sworn counter to all the noble vows of Arthur's hall. They rob, they murder, they hang the knights of the King's order, they revel in drunkenness and lewdness, and send a message of insolence and defiance to the King. Arthur goes against them and destroys them, but the spirit of lawlessness and contempt for authority is abroad.

“The foot that loiters, bidden go,—the glance
That only seems half loyal to command,”

[117-118.]

this the King feels all about him. The knights are babbling about the King, “whether he were king by courtesy or king by right,” disputing his authority and trampling underfoot his laws. And Modred is plotting rebellion. And surely this, the loss of respect for rightful authority and the contempt for just laws, is a sign of national decay in any age and any land.

There was a decadence of that virtue which the King

valued so highly—courtesy. Even he, blind though he seemed to the growing corruption of his realm, detected in his knights “a manner somewhat fallen from reverence,” and saw in their bearing evidence of degenerating manhood. The tournament had become an exhibition of bad manners. The laws of the tournament were openly disregarded. One knight “cursed the dead babe and the follies of the king.” Tristram, the popular hero of the day, and the winner of the prize, was rudely discourteous to the ladies. The evening feast was so boisterous and unmannerly that the Queen broke it up. The day furnished evidence for the verdict of one who murmured, “All courtesy is dead,” and of Lancelot, who muttered, “The glory of our Round Table is no more.” This, too, was a sign of national decay. Good morals and good manners are close akin. “Manners are not idle,” says our poet, “but the fruit of loyal nature and of noble mind.” Courtesy may indeed be counterfeited. Good manners may be cultivated by a sensualist as Gawain. But true courtesy accompanies true character. “Love doth not behave itself unseemly.” A pure, true heart cannot be rude and discourteous. It may break conventional rules of etiquette, but it cannot break the essential laws of courtesy. National courtesy, therefore, is a sign of national character, and the decadence of national courtesy is a symptom of national decay.

There was a loss of national ideals. What lofty ideals Arthur had set before his knights! He had sworn them

“To reverence the King as if he were
Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To honor his own word as if his God’s,

To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds,
Until they won her."

[*Guinevere*, 465-474.

What ideals of loyalty, of conscientiousness, of patriotism, of charity in deed and in word, of honor and truth and chastity, of allegiance to the Christ! These were the ideals which had made the nation great. These were the stars which the knights had once followed. But now their eyes were blinded to them. They no longer revered the King, nor obeyed conscience, nor eschewed slander, nor esteemed purity, nor worshiped womanhood, nor followed the Christ. Their great ideals were lost. The star of noble knighthood, like the Holy Grail, had vanished. It made "a silent music up in heaven," but only Dagonet and Arthur and the angels and the elect few could see and hear it. Sad indeed it is when a nation loses its great ideals. Such a misfortune is both a cause and a symptom of national decadence. That hour had come to Arthur's kingdom. The glory of the Round Table was no more.

A nation without ideals is a nation without character. Morality cannot survive the loss of noble ideals. When men lose these they let go of morality. And this, too, had come to pass in Arthur's realm;—Innocence was dead. This is symbolized by the dead babe whose jewels were the prize of the tournament. Arthur and Lancelot, riding one day beside a cliff, heard the cry of a child overhead. In a broken oak above the cliff they saw an eagle's nest, and in the nest Lancelot found a maiden babe with a ruby necklace around her neck. The babe was given to Guinevere, who received it coldly but learned to love it tenderly. But the exposure had brought on deep-seated disease, which

soon took it away. Then the Queen, giving the jewels to Arthur, said,

“Take thou the jewels of this dead innocence,
And make them, an thou wilt, a tourney-prize.

[31-32.

Perchance—who knows?—the purest of thy knights
May win them for the purest of thy maids.”

[49-50.

This tournament was called the Tournament of the Dead Innocence. The prize was won by Tristram, and given to Queen Isolt, wife of Mark! The babe is a symbol of innocence, and this dead babe signifies the death of Innocence in the realm. The jewels of Dead Innocence won by Tristram, the free-lover, and worn by Isolt, the faithless wife of Mark! What a picture of the moral degradation of the realm! Tristram is the hero of the hour and the popular ideal, and to him Innocence is dead. His song expresses the morality of the day;

“Free-love—free field—we love but while we may.
The woods are hushed, their music is no more;
The leaf is dead, their yearning passed away.
New leaf, new life—the days of frost are o’er;
New life, new love, to suit the newer day;
New loves are sweet as those that went before.
Free love—free field—we love but while we may.”

[275-281.

Tristram is the masculine counterpart of Vivien, and his song of Free-love is a fit companion to her song of the Fire of Heaven. Vivien has won, Sensuality has conquered, Innocence is dead, and Free-love walks trium-

phantly over its grave. And the nation hastens to destruction. So also does the free-lover. Deserting his bride of Brittany, he returns to his mistress of Britain. To her he gives the necklace as "his last love-offering and peace-offering."

But, while he bowed to kiss the jeweled throat,
Out of the dark, just as the lips had touched,
Behind him rose a shadow and a shriek—
"Mark's way," said Mark, and clove him through the
brain.

[745-748.]

The one bright spot in this picture is Dagonet, the fool. He is the true hero of this idyll. "He knows that Arthur's dream will never be fulfilled, knows that the Queen is false, and the knights are plotting treason, and the whole realm is on the verge of ruin; but still he holds fast to his master, and believes in him, and will not break his allegiance to follow the downward path of the court. Arthur has lifted him out of the baseness of his old life and made him a man. Maimed in wits and crippled in body, yet he has a soul,—this little, loyal jester,—and he will not lose it"* When others are corrupt and sensualism is fashionable, he remains pure. Tristram is no hero of his, and he refuses to dance to the music of the free-lover. When others are false to the King he remains loyal. When the fateful day had come, when Modred's hour had arrived and his conspiracy was ripe, when the dreaded exposure had been made and Lancelot and the Queen had fled,

That night came Arthur home, and while he climbed,
All in a death-dumb autumn-dripping gloom,
The stairway to the hall, and looked and saw

* Van Dyke's Poetry of Tennyson.

The great Queen's bower was dark,—about his feet
A voice clung sobbing till he questioned it,
“What art thou?” and the voice about his feet
Sent up answer, sobbing, “I am thy fool,
And I shall never make thee smile again.”

[749-756.]

CHAPTER XI.

GUINEVERE; RETRIBUTION AND REDEMPTION.

"To reverence the King, as if he were
Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To honor his own word as if his God's,
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds,
Until they won her; for indeed I knew
Of no more subtle master under heaven
Than is the maiden passion for a maid,
Not only to keep down the base in man,
But teach high thought, and amiable words,
And courtliness, and the desire of fame,
And love of truth, and all that makes a man."

In this idyll is related the crisis foreboded and hinted at in the Last Tournament. The illicit relations of Lancelot and the Queen, long suspected by every one save the guileless King, is at last brought to light. Modred, hating Lancelot, and coveting the throne, has been watching for an opportunity to expose their guilt and thus alienate Lancelot and the King and break up the Round Table, and then seize the throne. The long-looked-for opportunity comes. Lancelot and Guinevere have appointed a night in the King's absence when they would take their farewell

and he would go to his own land. Vivien, eavesdropping, tells Modred, and he brings his followers to the Queen's tower, and discovers Lancelot and the Queen together. Like a lion at bay, Lancelot springs upon him and hurls him to the ground. Then they flee, he at her request to his own land, she to the cloister of Almsbury. While the King is warring with Lancelot, Modred raises the standard of revolt and calls the heathen to his help. The King visits Guinevere at the cloister, and then marches against Modred. She repents of her sins, becomes a nun, by and by the abbess, and dies in peace. This is the bare outline of one of the saddest, most pathetic poems ever written. Leaving the reader to discover the beauty and pathos for himself, it is my purpose to point out the ethical and spiritual lessons of the poem.

This idyll teaches the penalty of illicit love. We have seen how Lancelot was tormented by remorse. Here we see how Guinevere also suffered for her sin. Conscience became her accusing angel and tormentor;

The Powers that tend the soul
To help it from the death that cannot die,
And save it even in extremes, began
To vex and plague her. Many a time for hours,
Beside the placid breathings of the King,
In the dead night, grim faces came and went
Before her, or a vague spiritual fear
Held her awake; or if she slept she dreamed
An awful dream.
And all this trouble did not pass but grew,
Till even the clear face of the guileless King,
And trustful courtesies of household life,
Became her bane.

Thus did conscience punish her for her sin. Shame, bitter shame, also became her portion. When her guilt was discovered she exclaimed, "The end is come and I am shamed forever." In the convent, in her despair, she moans,

"The shadow of another cleaves to me,
And makes me one pollution. He, the King,
Called me polluted. Shall I kill myself?
What help in that? I cannot kill my sin,
If soul be soul, nor can I kill my shame;
No, nor by living can I live it down.
The days will grow to weeks, the weeks to months,
The months will add themselves and make the years,
The years will roll into the centuries,
And mine will ever be a name of scorn."

[613-622.]

The loss of good name, the loss of respect, the breaking up of the home, social ostracism, eternal shame, remorse,—these are the penalties which fall upon the violator of the marriage law.

But the punishment of the guilty ones is not the whole consequence of this sin. The poem shows how sin affects others, how its influence reaches far and wide. The example of Lancelot and Guinevere leads others to sin. After this liaison in high life,

"Came the sin of Tristram and Isolt;
Then others, following these my mightiest knights,
And drawing foul ensample from fair names,
Sinned also, till the loathsome opposite
Of all my heart had destined did obtain."

[485-489.]

Nor was this all. The breaking up of the Round Table and the ruin of the realm was traceable directly to the sin of Guinevere. The King said to her truly,

“The children born of thee are sword and fire,
Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws,
The craft of kindred and the godless hosts
Of heathen swarming o’er the Northern Sea.”

[422-424.]

Arthur’s fair dream was shattered and his heart was broken and his kingdom destroyed and himself and many others sent to death by this sin. Such was the terrible harvest of this illicit love. This is one of the chief lessons Tennyson would enforce in the *Idylls*. “He looked, and in the direct light, on the growth of sensuality, on the indifference to purity, on the loosening of the marriage vow, on the unchaste results of luxury of life, on the theory and practice of free love, as one of the worst evils, and perhaps the worst, which can inflict individual, social, and national life.”* He tells the story of Lancelot and Guinevere to show the terrible consequences of loose morals and unchastity among the upper classes. “He brings all the ruin back to them. It is their guilt also which made the invasion of the court by Vivien possible—that is, through their love, with all its faithfulness, the lust of the flesh stole in, and the whole of society was corrupted. Again and again is this point made by Tennyson. No matter how seeming fair an unlicensed love may be, no matter how faithful and deep, it ends in opening to others the door to sensuality, which itself has no faithfulness, no depth, and no enduring beauty. Guinevere is followed by Vivien, and Lancelot by Tristram.”*

* Brooke’s Tennyson. 298-9.

The poet puts into the mouth of Arthur another ethical message for his generation, a message concerning the duty of the husband whose wife is false. He makes Arthur to say to Guinevere,

"I hold that man the worst of public foes
Who either for his own or children's sake,
To save his blood from scandal, lets his wife
Whom he knows false abide and rule the house:
For being through his cowardice allowed
Her station, taken everywhere for pure,
She, like a new disease, unknown to men,
Creeps, no precaution used, among the crowd,
Makes wicked lightnings of her eyes, and saps
The fealty of our friends, and stirs the pulse
With devil's leaps, and poisons half the young."

[509-519.

He cannot take her back to his heart and hearth, she cannot be to him what she was before, he cannot touch her lips, he cannot take her hand, she cannot be to him as wife. But still he loves her and forgives her and tries to redeem her. He does not cast her off forever, but promises that when she becomes pure again she may return to him once more. That could not be in this world, for Arthur is going to his doom. But, says he,

"Perchance, and so thou purify thy soul,
And so thou lean on our fair father Christ,
Hereafter in that world where all are pure
We, too, may meet before high God, and thou
Wilt spring to me, and claim me thine, and know
I am thine husband."

[558-563.

The poem teaches that it is our duty and privilege to love the highest. Arthur is the embodiment of the Christ character, he is "the highest" which Guinevere failing to recognize as such failed to love. As long as she looked at him through the eyes of Sense she could not know him as the highest. But when in Almsbury, through tears of repentance, she looked upon him with the eyes of Soul, she recognized the highest and loved him. And then she saw her fatal mistake, and exclaimed,

"Ah, my God,
What might I not have made of thy fair world,
Had I but loved thy highest creature here?
It was my duty to have loved the highest;
It surely was my profit had I known;
It would have been my pleasure had I seen.
We needs must love the highest when we see it."

[549-555.

So we may say of Christ, "the highest, holiest manhood." It is our *duty* to love Him, for He is our rightful Lord. It is our *profit* also to love Him, for He abundantly rewards us and He Himself is our exceeding great reward. When we learn to love Him, we find it our highest *pleasure*, too. And when we come to know Him, when we see Him with spiritual eyes, "We needs *must* love the Highest."

Arthur's love for Guinevere illustrates Christ's love for the sinful soul. When Arthur knew her guilt, he did not cease to love her. He loathed her sin, but the woman he still loved. Said he,

"Think not, though thou wouldst not love thy lord,
Thy lord has wholly lost his love for thee.

[505-6.

My love through flesh hath wrought unto my life
So far that my doom is, I love thee still.
Let no man dream but that I love thee still."

[555-7.

And it was his love and the knowledge of his love that awoke love in her heart for him. And love wrought repentance, and repentance brought salvation. And in the humble service of the cloister, in prayers and fastings and almsgiving and helpful ministrations, she passed the remaining years of her life till she passed to that world where all is peace and into the loving arms of her lord. So Christ loves us. Though we forsake Him and are false to Him and pollute our souls with sin, He loves us still. And when we believe His love and see it, it begets love in our hearts, and love begets repentance and faith. And He holds out to us the promise that if we purify our souls, then "in that world where all are pure" we shall meet Him and claim Him as our own. Thus his hope becomes our hope, and we can say in the words of Guinevere,

"Blessed be the King, who hath forgiven
My wickedness to Him, and left me hope
That in my own heart I can live down sin
And be His mate hereafter in the heavens
Before high God!"

[629-633.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR; THE LAST BATTLE AND THE FINAL VICTORY OF THE SOUL.

And the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories, till the hull
Looked one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away.

* * * * *

Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb
Even to the highest he could climb, and saw,
Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,
Or thought he saw, the speck that bear the King,
Down that long water opening on the deep
Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go
From less to less and vanish into light,
And the new sun rose bringing the new year.

The story is drawing to a close. Arthur is driving Modred and his allies towards the western sea. Camping at night, Bedivere, keeping guard, hears the King moaning in his tent. Here we see again the struggle with doubt. Arthur is fighting the battle in his own soul. He is grappling with the old, old problem of evil. And he says to himself,

“I found Him in the shining of the stars,
I marked Him in the flowering of His fields,
But in His ways with men I find Him not.

I waged His wars and now I pass and die.
O me! for why is all around us here
As if some lesser God had made the world,
But had not force to shape it as he would,
Till the High God^h behold it from beyond,
And enter it, and make it beautiful?"

[9-17.]

The evil that is in the world, aye, the evil in his own realm, the guilt of his wife, the faithlessness and treachery of his knights, the shattering of his fair dream, the disruption of his realm,—why does God allow this? Does this evil exist because God does not care, or is it because He is powerless to prevent? Or is it because, as the gnostics taught, that the world was made by some lesser god, a demiurge, who had not power to make it better? This is a dilemma which confronts every thoughtful soul. How shall we account for the evil in the world? Is it due to lack of power or lack of goodness on the part of the Creator? Faith refuses to take either horn of the dilemma, but answers with Arthur,

"Or else as if the world were wholly fair,
But that these eyes of men are dense and dim,
And have not power to see it as it is—
Perchance because we see not to the close."

[18-21.]

Is not this the best solvent of the doubt, the best solution of the problem of evil? If we could see the world as it really is, see "the best that glimmers through the worst," see "the soul of good in evil things," see all the consequences of events, read to the end of the chapter, then might we find that "the world were wholly fair," that the

All-powerful is the All-good, as Browning declares "the All-great were the All-loving, too."

The great battle has been fought, and both armies annihilated. Modred has been slain, and Arthur sorely wounded. Of all his knights only Bedivere remains. Excalibur has struck its last blow, and the time has come for it to be cast away. Given to King Arthur by the Lady of the Lake, it must now be returned to her. Realizing that the time of his departure is near, the King says to Bedivere,

"But now delay not; take Excalibur,
And fling him far into the middle mere;
Watch what thou seest and lightly bring me word."

[204-6.

Bedivere takes the brand and descends to the lake with full purpose to obey the behest. But when he unsheathes the sword, and gazes upon its glittering blade and jeweled haft, he is tempted to disobey the King. He hesitates, then concludes to hide the sword among the flags, and strides slowly back to the King. Arthur is not deceived, but reproaches him and sends him back to do what he had been bidden. Again Bedivere dallies with the temptation, supports it with specious reasoning, sets his judgment above that of the King, and ends by disobeying the second time. Then the King, angry, orders him the third time to throw the sword into the lake. And he goes quickly and seizes the sword, and shuts his eyes lest the gems blind his purpose, and throws it. And lo! a wondrous sight! For out of the bosom of the lake rises a mystic arm and catches the sword by the hilt, brandishes it three times, and draws it under the water. This struggle of Bedivere is a picture of temptation, of the conflict of the soul with the temptation to disobedience. As he was tempted to disobey the

King, so we are constantly tempted to disobey our Lord. We do not see the reason for His command; we ask, "What good shall follow this, if this were done?" We set our judgment above His command. Is not this a temptation which comes to every one? When it comes let us remember that it is "Deep harm to disobey, seeing obedience is the bond of rule." Let us remember that loyalty requires unquestioning obedience to our King, and that only unfaltering obedience will win for us the commendation, "Well done." When the great King gives an order to his soldiers it should be

Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do *or* die.

But there is yet another struggle for the bold Bedivere. He must do battle with Giant Despair. When he has carried Arthur down to the sea and placed him on the barge, and realizes that his King is going away, and that all their glorious dream is shattered, despair seizes him and he utters his lament;

"Ah! my lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?
From now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight.
Such times have been not since the light that led
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
But now the whole Round Table is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world;
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds."

[395-406.]

Many a soul has battled with a similar despair. Jeremiah and his compatriots contended with it when they saw the power and glory of their kingdom pass away and the people led into captivity. The Greeks suffered it when their national independence was lost and their liberties were taken from them. The Saxons felt it on that fateful day of St. Calixtus, when the Saxon battle-axes went down before the Norman spears, and their power was broken. The Southerners were overwhelmed by it when at Appomattox Court House their commander surrendered, and the Stars and Bars went down before the Stars and Stripes, and the old régime passed away. The Disciples fought with it when they saw their Lord crucified and it seemed His kingdom was buried in the Aramathean's tomb. You and I have battled with it when we have seen our fairest hopes shattered and our plans thwarted and the whole order of our lives changed. Every pilgrim on the road to the Promised Land must do battle with Giant Despair.

Arthur's answer reveals the greatness of his character and the wideness of his vision. He has conquered doubt, and found God "in His ways with men." And now as he departs he looks back upon the ruin of his realm and says to Bedivere,

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

[408-410.

History is one long commentary upon this saying. The old order is constantly changing, yielding place to the new, and in the new God fulfills His purposes, and makes all work together for good. The Hebrews became greater in their dispersion than in their golden age. The national downfall of the Greeks assured their intellectual suprem-

acy and made them a blessing to all the world. The field of Senlac was the renaissance of the English nation, the Norman conquest was the beginning of a new order of greater power and higher life in Britain. The expatriation of the Puritans and Pilgrims was the beginning of a new nation. The destruction of the old régime in the Southern States was followed by a new régime of greater prosperity and higher ideals. The old order of the personal visible ministry of Jesus was changed to yield place to the wider invisible spiritual ministry. He must needs go away that He might come again in greater power. He must ascend into heaven that He might be Lord of the whole earth.

Bedivere had coveted Excalibur, but Arthur tells him of a better weapon for the Soul in its warfare with Sense,—the sword of prayer;

“Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend.
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.”

[415-423.]

This is the word of St. James: “The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working.” It is the word of St. Paul: “Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks.” It is the word of Jesus, “that they ought always to pray, and not to faint.” To pray is human, not to pray is bestial. The prayerless life is no

better than the life of the beasts. Nor is the effect of prayer subjective only, it moves the heart of God. It is

A breath that fleets beyond this iron world
And touches Him that made it.

[*Tennyson's Harold.*]

It is a means of communion with God. It is a bond of union with God. Milton conceived the World to be suspended from heaven by a golden chain; Tennyson represents prayer as the golden chain by which the Earth is bound about the feet of God.

The passing of Arthur is a beautiful allegory of death. His friend Bedivere carried him to the shore of the sea,

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them; and descending they were 'ware
That all the decks were dense with stately forms,
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these
Three queens with crowns of gold—and from them rose
A cry that shivered to the tingling stars.

Then murmured Arthur, "Place me on the barge."
So to the barge they came. Then those three queens
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.
But she that rose the tallest of them all
And fairest laid his head upon her lap.

[361-376.]

. . . And the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs.

[434-438.]

The sea is the great deep of Eternity from which the Soul comes and to which it goes. The dark barge is death, coming like a ship to carry the Soul away from the shores of Time. The stately forms on deck are the ministering spirits from the other world, who bear the Soul company on its voyage. And the three queens who put forth their hands and took the King are Faith, and Hope, and Love, the Graces who befriend the Soul and "help him at his need."

The island-valley of Avilion,
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crowned with summer sea,—
[427-431.]

this is Heaven. And there at last Soul is crowned victor over Sense. As Bedivere stood on a lofty crag watching the vanishing ship,

Then from the dawn it seemed there came, but faint
As from beyond the limit of the world,
Like the last echo born of a great cry,
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice
Around a king returning from his wars.
[457-461.]

THE END





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